

A HOUSE DIVIDED: REGIONALISM AND THE FORM  
OF MIDWESTERN AND SOUTHERN FICTION, 1832-1925

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For my mother

VERNA McLEOD HOLMAN

by the wishes of her son and  
of her husband, C. Hugh Holman

## PREFACE

Because it begins with selection, a study like this one necessarily must leave out much. I have not dealt here with the Chicago novelists, but not because I do not think them to be Midwestern. I do. But I think they show regional characteristics within a very specialized genre of fiction--the urban novel. Such a study is a project unto itself. So, too, is the study of regional humor, especially of the Southern "flush times" writers and the Midwestern social satirists. Though I touch upon it in places, I can make no claims, nor do I intend any, for any close examination of regional humor.

It is hardly surprising that so many regional studies are entitled "Notes for the Further Study of . . . " or "Some Notes Toward . . . ." Perhaps, this is because so much of region, like heredity, is ineffable, eluding definition or expression. That special sense of place that permeates regional literature is often expressed not so much in clear tones, as in resonances and vibrations. In this study, I have attempted to locate and to examine some of those resonances and vibrations as they are voiced in the literature of two regions, the South and the Midwest. The regionalist critic is always voicing a minority opinion against the majority opinion which sees American

literature as the product of a generally homogeneous culture. The regionalist sees America as a composite of separate and distinct regions whose individual histories, values, and socio-economic conditions create, in the people of the region, a communal psychology or "mind" that is fundamentally different from the "minds" of other respective regions. Thus, to the regionalist, the American Tradition, as it is often expressed by literary historians, is the generalized combination of discrete literatures from discrete cultures. To return to my metaphor of undertones and resonances, I have tried to locate those regional undertones which reverberate slightly discordantly with the general harmony of American letters. But in calling attention to these discords, I have done so in the belief that such an investigation will eventually lead to the perception of a more intricate and complexly rich harmony.

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## CHAPTER I

### WHY REGIONALISM?

When General Robert E. Lee, Confederate States Army, and Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, United States Army, met at Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865 to discuss the terms of surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia, neither man could have imagined the emblematic significance of that meeting. But that event, which did not signal the surrender of all Confederate troops, just as Gettysburg was not the final battle of the war, has become metaphor for the entire conflict of which the hostilities of 1861-65 were only the culmination. Paraphrasing the descriptions given by witnesses to the scene, Shelby Foote, in his narrative history of the Civil War, gives a typical description:

Grant entered and went at once to Lee, who rose to meet him. They shook hands, one of middle height, slightly stooped, his hair and beard "nut brown without a trace of gray," a little awkward and more than a little embarrassed, as he himself later said, mud-spattered trouser legs stuffed into muddy boots, tunic rumpled and dusty, wearing no side arms, nor even spurs, and the other tall and patrician-looking, immaculately groomed and clad, with his red sash and ornate sword, fire-gilt buttons and polished brass, silver

hair and beard, demonstrating withal, as one observer noted, "that happy blend of dignity and courtesy so difficult to describe." Fifteen years apart in age--the younger commander's forty third birthday was just over two weeks off--they presented a contrast in more than appearance.<sup>1</sup>

Grant, himself, though he notes "it was not a matter that I thought of until afterwards," demonstrates in his Personal Memoirs that he, too, was impressed with the specific details of the encounter:

General Lee was dressed in a full uniform which was entirely new, and was wearing a sword of considerable value, very likely the sword which had been presented by the State of Virginia; at all events, it was an entirely different sword from one that would ordinarily be worn in the field. In my rough traveling suit, the uniform of a private, with the straps of a Lieutenant-General, I must have contrasted very strangely with a man so handsomely dressed, six feet high, and of faultless form.<sup>2</sup>

Grant's afterthought, under the scrutiny of our twenty-twenty hindsight, has become an American parable for us, just as have the first shot at Concord, and the bombing in Haymarket Square. These events have acquired meanings of which the observers of the actual historical occurrence could not have conceived; they have grown from the historical to the mythological.

In the meeting of these two antagonists we have come to see the final surrender of the Southern patriot to the Midwestern commoner, the subjection of



manners to methods, the victory of pragmatism over romanticism, the final triumph of democracy over aristocracy and slavery. As Americans, we see the presage of the twentieth century. But we also see more: we see region.

A Southerner or a Midwesterner sees what Americans see, but also attaches a regional importance to the event; and we can see other Americans as Southerners and Midwesterners, and so can also participate in those regional evaluations. We expect the Southerner (but not a Southerner) to see in the Appomattox meeting the fall of discrete culture and its eventual replacement by industrial conformity. We expect him to see in the victory of the Northern armies, the irresistible but deplorable defeat of gentlemen by a mob of commoners. Likewise, we expect the Midwesterner to see Lee's surrender as a moral judgment on the degenerate aristocratic South, and the triumph of Grant's and Sherman's Army of the West where the Eastern Army of the Potomac had failed as proof that the strength of American character and democracy resides, not in the East, but in the farms and small towns of the Middle West.<sup>3</sup> We expect this of the Southerner and the Midwesterner, because we, whether Southerner, Midwesterner, New Englander, or Westerner, all participate in a commonly held idea of region.

The concept of regionalism has often had its own political overtones which have served to obfuscate what the term regional really means. Frederick Jackson Turner's sectional theory of America, in which each region and its life is synecdoche for the entire country, finds its most complete application in Howard Odum's American Regionalism: A Cultural-Historical Approach to National Integration.<sup>4</sup> Professor Odum attempts in this pioneering study to define a science of regionalism for social scientists, historians, geographers, and critics; but as is often true with social scientists and critics of all disciplines, Odum's theory finally rests on a preconceived political notion of what America is or, at least, should be. For Odum (and to a lesser degree for Turner), the study of region is the study of a coordinate America--a pursuit in which the regional differences examined ultimately point to national similarities. In American Regionalism, Odum states that "the thesis of this volume is that the promise and prospect of the nation in the future is . . . to be found in the substitution of a realistic and comprehensive regionalism for the older historical sectionalism."<sup>5</sup> Odum's contention that

the theme of American regionalism is, after all, that of a great American Nation, the land and the people, in whose continuity and unity of development, through a fine equilibrium of geographic, cultural, and historical factors,

must be found not only the testing grounds of American democracy but, according to many observers, the hope of western civilization

is the statement of a political idealist, rather than of a social scientist.<sup>6</sup>

In Odum's second chapter, "From Sectionalism to Regionalism," the discussion of regionalism becomes blurred by a semantic argument over the terms "region" and "section." This argument, unfortunately, continues to be a pitfall in many discussions of regionalism. For Frederick Jackson Turner, these terms were quite useful, region denoting a geographical area and section denoting an area of recognizable political and cultural homogeneity. Region refers to natural boundaries; section to intellectual ones. For Turner, the first always composes a part of the whole, while the second calls attention to the differences. With Howard Odum, however, the terms become a political vocabulary--the advocate of regionalism is a nationalist and the advocate of sectionalism, a separatist. Odum writes:

Herein lies the essential quality of sectionalism; inherent in it is the idea of separatism and isolation; of separate units with separate interests. It must be clear that, since the very definition of regionalism implies a unifying function, it must be different from sectionalism as everywhere defined by historians. Here the distinctions are clear between the divisive power of self-seeking sections and the integrating power of co-ordinate regions fabricated into a united whole. The premise of the new

regionalism goes further and assumes that the United States must not, either because of its bigness and complexity or because of conflicting interests, become a federation of conflicting sections but a homogeneity of varying regions.<sup>7</sup>

Odum's definitions and political expectations for regionalism gave rise to a long-continued semantic debate over the terms region and section with Donald Davidson, a member of the Nashville Agrarian movement. This debate, as it takes place in Odum's American Regionalism and Davidson's The Attack on Leviathan is in actuality a debate between a confirmed believer in national governmental centrality and an advocate of regional political autonomy.<sup>8</sup> The debate is in one sense regional in that it is a debate that shows largely the divisions between Chapel Hill and Nashville political thinking, but its value to the concept of regionalism is minimal and the damage that it has done by obscuring the topic in a smokescreen of political rhetoric has been substantial.<sup>9</sup> Finally, I would agree that the terms section and region are both part of the study of regionalism, and as Turner first used them to describe place and thought, are the two truly inseparable concepts from which any idea of regionalism must proceed.

I am interested here in literary and cultural regionalism, rather than in the specific statistical studies of geographers and social scientists. Such studies are concerned with facts; I am concerned with fictions. The facts are, of course, important to fictions but only insofar as they help to explain the births of and the fictive nature of regional mythologies. I would maintain that what is not factual, but rather what is believed in spite of any facts, is at the core of what informs regional mythologies and the literature of region.

Of necessity, this conception of region is dialectical--it is both sectional and regional in Frederick Jackson Turner's terminology, because it arises simultaneously from the way in which a region is seen by those outside of the region and the way in which it sees itself. Terms like "Southern" and "Midwestern" are as much derivative in meaning from the people of these regions as from those who live outside of them. A regional mythology, in order to remain dynamic, must find verification of its existence outside of its region; otherwise, it does not serve to delineate the region as separate and different from the rest of the country. Thus it is that Shreve can ask Quentin in Absalom, Absalom!, "Why do you hate the South?" and know that he and the Southern youth at least hold some common

assumptions (though not common interpretations) of what the South is that make the question valid as communication, as a question.

The regional artist is always working with an awareness of this insider-outsider dialectic and it is the test of this literature that the writer is able to maintain this "we" versus "they" awareness in his work, while at the same time showing that in fundamental and important ways "we" are "they" as well. Allen Tate articulates this point in his essay, "The New Provincialism," in which Tate defines as regional the literature which, by concerning itself with the particular people and culture, and history of its world, brings that world and its inhabitants into a true relation with those of all other worlds.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Tate says, "Regionalism is limited in space but not in time."<sup>11</sup> Provincialism, Tate tells us, results from the concerns of a literature which has no specific significance for or communion with the people outside of the region presented.

The provincial attitude is limited in time but not in space. When regional man, in his ignorance, often an intensive and creative ignorance, of the world, extends his own immediate necessities into the world, and assumes that the present moment is unique, he becomes provincial man. He cuts himself off from the past, and without benefit of the fund of traditional wisdom approaches the simplest problems of life, as if nobody had ever heard of them before.<sup>12</sup>

Tate voices the thesis of most regional writers that regional literature will ultimately transcend the concerns of its section and that its focus on the particular ultimately approaches the universal.

Failure to make a relationship between the region presented and the world outside of that region results in the regional provincialism that Tate describes in "The New Provincialism;" in the opening essay of Crumbling Idols (1894), Hamlin Garland describes another type of provincialism, that of "feudalistic literature," which is a literature of conformity and imitation that by its emphasis on the national or the universal ignores the particulars of culture and place which give literature substance and life.<sup>13</sup> Garland maintains that non-provincial, and hence truly national literature, will be the literature of region. "It will be such a literature as no other locality could produce, a literature that could not have been written in any other time, or among other surroundings."<sup>14</sup> Taken together, Tate's and Garland's differing definitions of provincialism illustrate the perhaps unique dilemma of many American writers. They are writing about two worlds, two countries, two cultures--that of region and that of nation. And the worlds are different, but not separate; each partakes of each. And the writer must find the relationship between these worlds and the themes of his

story as, for example, Faulkner does in The Town, in which the regional social problems of modernization coalesce with the national experience. The particular challenge facing the regional writer is to avoid both literary myopia and hypermetropia--that is to avoid focusing on either the particular uniqueness or the universality of his regional world at the expense of the other.

Although a staunch defender of political sectionalism, Donald Davidson voices an agreement with both Garland and Tate on the nature of literary regionalism. In an essay entitled "Regionalism and Nationalism," Davidson writes:

We cannot define regionalism unless at the same time we define nationalism. The two are supplementary aspects of the same thing. Regionalism is a name for a condition under which the national American literature exists as a literature: that is, its constant tendency to decentralize rather than to centralize; or to correct overcentralization by conscious decentralization, or it describes the conditions under which it is possible for literature to be a normal<sup>15</sup> artistic outgrowth of the life of a region.

Davidson warns that "the writer of a given region cannot shut himself away under the name 'regionalist,' but he must, from his region, confront the total and moving world."<sup>16</sup>

But what is a regional writer? I would define the regional writer, as opposed to the writer who is simply



from a geographical region of the country, by the extent to which he or she participates in the communal psychology of the region--the extent to which his or her works manifest the values of the region and the extent to which those values inform the world of literature. The regional writer is not only writing about the region, but is also writing with an awareness gained through experience of what the region really means. The region is not merely setting, but rather a nexus of values, beliefs, and customs that make it a special location for the fiction. "When we talk about a writer's country," Flannery O'Connor remarks,

we are liable to forget that no matter what particular country it is, it is inside as well as outside of him. Art requires a delicate adjustment of the outer and inner worlds in such a way that, without changing their nature, they can be seen through each other. To know oneself is to know one's region. It is to know the world, and it is also, paradoxically, a form of exile from that world. The writer's value is lost, both to himself and to his country, as soon as he ceases to see that country as a part of himself. . . .<sup>17</sup>

The regional artist is participant as well as reporter of the region and, as arbiter of the worlds outside of and within the region, fully participates in both. Harriet Beecher Stowe's New England is richer than her South of Uncle Tom's Cabin; it is a more complete and complex world, and finally, a more recognizable one.

Few writers set out to be "regional." In fact, "regional writer" is an appellation which is apt to meet with more scorn from writers themselves than from critics. Regional writing implies local color as the predominant aim of the writer. Few Southern writers would appreciate classification with Thomas Nelson Page and few Midwestern writers with Edward Eggleston. Certainly this aversion is not completely one of artistic quality, although it may be more so with Page than with Eggleston, but rather one of intention in the creation of a literary work. Local color as the examination and presentation of exotics is anathema to the aims of most serious writers to present not only a region but the world as they see it. As Miss O'Connor remarks, the novelist is presenting the world within as well as without. Local color is concerned mainly with this outside world.

This is not to say that the writer always abjures the title "regional," but only that he does so when it is used as an indicator of limitation. The artist wishes to be considered in the main group "writers" before he or she is placed as well into the subset, "regional writer." The rationale behind this feeling is clear; one wishes to be a large fish in the largest pond possible. Just as Ralph Ellison has balked at being labeled one of the best black authors, so William

Faulkner would be equally nonplussed at the pronouncement of himself as "one of the best Mississippi writers" or Southern writers for that matter. "Regional" as adjective is often the faint praise that damns.

But "regional," as I wish to employ it in this investigation of American writers, is not a limiting term, but rather a method of explaining, in part, the cultural consciousness that lies behind and indeed informs the literary achievement of many distinguished American authors. To speak of American literature or of anything "American" necessarily implies that there is somewhere a recognizable America or, in the case of literature, a recognizable American tradition. To speak of regional literature or indeed of region seems to imply that, in truth, this single America never exists. What is regional about American literature eludes any social scientific quantification, at least for the twentieth-century American. To the observer who knew nothing of the country before he visited, the noticeable differentiations would appear to be economic--industrial and agrarian, and social--rural and urban. Yet that observer, as he traveled throughout the country would find regional differences in the cultures, attitudes, and lifestyles of the peoples of different areas. If this observer lived long enough in the country he would be likely to generalize less about "Americans" and more

about Southerners, New Englanders, Midwesterners, Westerners, and, today, Californians. He would come finally to the conclusion that there is in fact one America and simultaneously several Americas.<sup>18</sup> He would also conclude that the existence of these several Americas could not be explained simply by settlement patterns, climate, income, and per capita tabulations of bourbon or Scotch consumed or churches attended, although each of these figures would perhaps be useful to his investigation. He could not explain through these quantifiers the difference in attitudes of a Boston millionaire, an Atlanta millionaire, a Dallas millionaire and a Chicago millionaire, although they might help to explain the differences in the way that these four came to be millionaires. And it is likely that he would find these four urban gentlemen more nearly similar than three farmers from Michigan, South Carolina, and New Hampshire or three insurance salesmen from Cartersville, Georgia, Lancaster, Vermont, and Carbondale, Illinois. If he stayed long enough in each region he might be able to delineate the different personality of each communal psychology and also to articulate the similarities. But in order to account for these differences, he would have to discuss the regional mythologies that underlie the cultural differences. Again he would have to differentiate between the regional and national mythologies; in

doing so, he would find that America is a country of shared and unshared pasts.

The shared or national past would include such events as George Washington's apocryphal tossing of the dollar across the Potomac River or the united stand of the colonies in the meetings of the Continental Congress. He would find across the country a general shared reverence for the Founding Fathers, for Thomas Jefferson, and for Benjamin Franklin. He would find eventually, however, that in historical events such as the meeting of Grant and Lee at Appomattox that the shared past differentiates into unshared regional interpretation. And it is through his examination of these different historical mythologies that he would find the mythological frameworks that underlie the regional psychologies that he has witnessed. He would find, in fact, that Lee's surrender was contemporary with the regional mind that he encountered.

In this investigation, I shall concentrate upon selected Midwestern and Southern writers whose works appeared between 1832 and 1925, the year in which The Great Gatsby was published and American fictional modernism became a major force in American letters. By examining the work of these writers I wish to show how regional cultures and attitudes have shaped (and continue to shape) the form of American fiction. My

reasons for selecting these two particular regions are four-fold. The first, and the most obvious, reason, since this is a literary investigation of regionalism, is that the South and the Midwest have generated the largest number of writers who have made the most significant contributions to modern American fiction. Certainly from World War I on, Americans from all of the regions of the country have produced important and enduring fiction, but an overwhelming number of these writers have come out of the South and the Midwest--Southerners Glasgow, Faulkner, Wolfe, Tate, O'Connor, Warren, Caldwell, Welty, and Percy; and Midwesterners Cather, Anderson, Lewis, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway (particularly in the Nick Adams stories). Also of great interest is that the fiction of these two regions, until the second decade of the twentieth-century, is characterized by the use of two distinctly separate fictional modes--romance in the South and social realism in the Midwest.

The second reason for selecting the South and the Midwest for this study, is that the South, largely because of the Civil War, is the section most easily defined and accepted by the nation as region, while the Midwest is the region which defines itself most as nation and is accepted as such by other regions of the country. The South is another place; the Midwest is

"the Heartland." The Southerner is recognizable nationally even today by accent and by vernacular; the South is still the most rural region of the country. The Midwest has less identification with the specific historical event, the Civil War, the Plymouth Colony, the Gold Rush, than other sections of the country. Its great industrial and metropolitan centers and its abundant farm lands as well contribute to the national and regional conception of the Middle West as microcosm of the national macrocosm.

Third, the South and the Midwest are greater than a century and a half apart in settlement and cultural development, and hence, are historically different regions. Both have distinct regional "minds," to use W.J. Cash's term, and, yet, have at the basis of these minds an agrarian philosophy which even today continues as a strong cultural influence in each region.

Last, the mythologies of these two regions are diametrically opposed in their attitudes toward their pasts. The past of the South is tragic and complete, and the present and the future are measured by this idea of the Lost Cause. The Midwestern mind is characterized by a belief in the possibility that the promise of the past can be realized in the future, and, thus, that the present is a constant reminder of the region's and the

nation's failure to keep faith with the ideals of the past and with the promise of the future.

None of these four hypotheses is exclusive of the others, or at least, not for the investigation of literature. My descriptions and conclusions about the development of social realism in the Midwest and the development of the romance form in the South and then the turning away from that form, rest finally on a belief that the literature of a region, both in form and in content, is inseparable from the culture in which that literature is formed, and also, that literature is no mere cultural artifact, but that it can be a dynamic force which affects as well as is affected by the culture in which it is produced.

As I discussed earlier, in a single historical event, Lee's surrender at Appomattox, we can find multiple regional meanings. And it is those meanings and the mind that constructs them that ultimately are the materials for the regional writer. The great events in the mythmaking mind of the South and the Midwest, respectively, are the Civil War and the settling of the Middle States--the myth of the aristocrat and the myth of the pioneer. Consider the two following passages which are perhaps epigrammatic for these regional attitudes.



The first is from William Faulkner's Intruder in the Dust:

For every Southern boy fourteen year old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself with his long oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand probably and his sword in the other looking up the hill waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it's all in the balance, it hasn't happened yet, it hasn't even begun yet, it not only hasn't begun yet there is still time for it not to begin against that position and those circumstances which made more men than Garnett and Kemper and Armstead and Wilcox look grave; yet it's going to begin, we all know that, we have come too far with too much at stake and that moment doesn't need even a fourteen year old boy to think This time. Maybe this time with all this<sub>19</sub> much to lose and all this much to gain. . . .

The second is from Louis Bromfield's The Green Bay Tree:

Life is hard for our children. It isn't as simple as it was for us. Their grandfathers were pioneers and the same blood runs in their veins, only they haven't a frontier any longer. They stand . . . these children of ours . . . with their backs toward this rough hewn middle west and their faces set toward Europe and the East and they belong to nei-<sup>20</sup>ther. They are lost somewhere between.

Little needs to be said, here, about the actual causes of the Civil War except to repeat that this conflict like so many others was at least as much a conflict of economics and politics, specifically tariff

laws and congressional balance, as it was a moral conflict over slavery or a class system; what is important, however, to the Southern mind, is precisely that belief in the existence of a culture of chivalry, and that belief in the inherent honor of the Lost Cause, and yet the recognition of the tragedy of slavery. As Faulkner's passage shows, it is belief that is important, in the completeness of the past, in a cause lost, and so finished, and so completed, and therefore, meaningful, comprehensible, and mythic. In Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back, Robert Penn Warren emphasizes this completeness, adding that "it was not until Appomattox that the conception of Southern identity truly bloomed--a mystical conception, vague but bright, floating high beyond the criticism of brutal circumstances."<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps the Midwest, as a less often discussed region, needs more explanation. The Midwesterner inherits the myth of the farmer and pioneer. Like the characters of Willa Cather's My Antonia or O.E. Rolvaag's Giants in the Earth, the Midwesterner comes out of the East, the World's melting pot, looking for something better, and finds it in the land which blossoms from the sweat of his brow. Here are the true people of Carl Sandburg's The People, Yes; here is America, the bastion of democratic values, the

heartland, the home of simple moral folk. This is the myth--the Kansas of The Wizard of Oz. Yet these are the facts: by 1850, seventy per cent of the Midwest's population lived in towns or cities larger than 1500 people. By 1880, less than half the families engaged in farming owned the land they farmed. In Iowa, for example, twenty-seven of the thirty-six million acres of farmland passed through the hands of land speculators. And presently in the Midwest, the city population outnumbers the country population by better than two to one.<sup>22</sup>

But it is the myth that is important.

The regional writer is writing in response to these mythologies, and often in reaction to these mythologies. Although both Americans, the Southern writer and the Midwestern writer are responding to different American pasts. For the Southerner that past is both heritage and trap as exemplified in Faulkner, Glasgow, Welty, and Wolfe. Like the Twelve Southerners who took their stand then moved and took it again at a distance, the past must be simultaneously used and reconstructed.<sup>23</sup> With notable exceptions, Erskine Caldwell for instance, there is the element of a gothic past that lies just beneath the surface of most Southern writing. Even so realistic a novel as Ellen Glasgow's Barren Ground cannot escape the ravages of a romantic past, and the reader senses,

beneath Glasgow's examination of Southern class structure, resonances of chains rattling in the slave quarters or the moonlit scene of a woman in a white dress running to or from an imposing plantation house. Even in writing about the present, the Southern writer directly or indirectly must confront the ghosts of the past: ghosts that may be exorcised, villified, satirized, or romanticized--but not ignored.

But if the Southern past, the Lost Cause, is one of mythic, and to use Tate's adjective, "immoderate" completion, the Midwestern past is one of a promise unfulfilled and unattained.<sup>24</sup> It is a past attractive to the Midwestern writer only at a distance--attractive to Nick Carraway only after he has seen New York, to My Antonia's Jim Burden and Winesburg, Ohio's George Willard only after they have left for the city. Midwesterners flee the Midwest to the East and to Europe. As Craig Watson has remarked, if the Southerner says, "I'll take my stand," the Midwesterner proclaim, "I'll take my flight--preferably the first one out."<sup>25</sup> For those who stay, the promise of the past and its perversion in the present must be confronted--and the dominant mode of this confrontation is realism. Where the Southerners--Faulkner, Caldwell, O'Connor, Welty, and McCullers--are storytellers, the Midwesterners--Anderson, Lewis, Dell, and Bromfield--are

lecturers. The Midwestern literary humor is satire, the Southern humor is distancing--black humor, the grotesque. The difference is clearly seen in the bedroom of Faulkner's "A Rose of Emily" and the dining room of Cather's "Sculptor's Funeral."

The Southerner and the Midwesterner both confront a modern America that is bleak in comparison to their historical pasts. But the definition of that disparity between the past and the present is different for each region. For the inheritor of the pioneer legacy, the world is now too confining, too organized, too conformist. For the Southerner, the world is in chaos, lacking the organization and order once present in manners and a defined class structure. Yet, what these writers are confronting is, in one sense, the same America, but it is an America made different for each region by an unshared mythological past.

Ultimately these two Americas, the shared national America and the unshared regional America, lie not in the present but in the past--not an historical past but a mythological one. America has always been a future oriented country obsessed with the past and the creation of a past for itself. The post-Revolutionary War American of the late eighteenth century, lacking a past by spurning Europe, found himself uniquely contemporary with the mythologies he created. Revolutionary War

heroes and statesmen were portrayed in numerous statues and paintings in classical garb and even as classical gods. The Euphuistic was embodied in the literal so that many almost believed George Washington to merit not only figuratively but literally the Zeus-like attribute, "Father of the Country." America became nationally what North America had been figuratively--the New Eden. As a nation with a future, America had to seize upon a past. In a matter of years, "the shot heard 'round the world" had achieved the status of archetype.

The call for an American literature which had been voiced by Charles Brockden Brown, Thomas Jefferson, Washington Irving, William Gilmore Simms, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman and others was a call for literature not about things indigenous but a literature communicated by a mind indigenous, and in the years after the turn of the twentieth-century, young American critics attempted to aid in calling that literature into being. As Richard Ruland notes, "the past was the idiom for that call."<sup>26</sup> In an essay entitled "On Creating a Usable Past," which appeared in the April 11, 1918 issue of the Dial, Van Wyck Brooks laments that "the American writer . . . not only has the most meager birthright, but is cheated out of that." Brooks continues, "The past is void, and the American writer floats in that void because the past that survives in the common mind

of the present is a past without living value." "If we need another past so badly," he exhorts, "is it inconceivable that we might invent one?"<sup>27</sup>

Yet by 1918, the past was not only usable but used, although that past was fundamentally unshared by the regions that compose America. To Brooks and others, the gaping holes in the shared American mythology exhibited clearly the regional differences. Brooks was correct in his assertion that the "spiritual past has no reality; it yields only what we are able to look for in it," but in 1918, and even today, Americans were not and are not looking for the same things.<sup>28</sup> At the time of Brooks' call to arms, the western territories had hardly been open for half a century while New England and the seaboard South had been settled for over two hundred and fifty years. What the different regions of the country shared was less than the differences they reflected.

The search to articulate an "American Tradition" in literature, an undertaking admirably explored and explained by Howard Mumford Jones in The Theory of American Literature, has always had at its core the belief that what is shared in the American mythological past is of greater importance than the sum of the component mythologies of America's regions.<sup>29</sup> While this search for an American Tradition, which finds its most virile progenitors in Emerson and Whitman, has

elevated the study of American letters from a single professorship before 1917 to a growing and respected academic field in the American and international academies, it has, in the last quarter century, driven American literature scholars to yield in despair of a comprehensive American picture to the employment of narrowly focused theoretical methods, or to try to make a more manageable picture out of American letters by forcing the literature into a moulded thesis rather than by moulding the thesis to the literature. The latter has resulted in intelligent and provocative but nevertheless oversimplified thesis books such as R.W.B. Lewis' The American Adam and Leo Marx's The Machine in the Garden.<sup>30</sup>

The myth of the Garden, the New Eden, as espoused by Lewis, Marx, Henry Nash Smith, and others, is a dynamic idea of the American frontier and its settlement.<sup>31</sup> It is descriptive of both the political hopes of the American settler and the landscapes he encountered and is an image voiced, but for different reasons, by Captain John Smith of Virginia and by the Puritan settlers in New England. But this conformity is misleading; the new Eden as idea results more from a basic European Christian orientation and education (later the idea will be Prometheus) than from a unity of ideals and experiences. The New England settlers and the Southern



settlers, and later the Western settlers, all encountered metaphorical gardens in America, but those gardens were as dissimilar as a tropical greenhouse and an oriental rock-sage arrangement.

When the settlers at Jamestown eyed the green rolling Virginia coastline and the settlers at Plymouth viewed the rocky New England coast and both proclaimed "Garden," the lack of communication between the two groups was almost total. The garden that met the eye and the garden that met the mind's eye were as radically dissimilar as the attitudes and beliefs that brought the appellation "Eden" to each group's mind in the first place. Purpose differing, so did the gardens seen. Both gardens were edenic and economic, but at Jamestown, Eden was in the service of the economy; at Plymouth, economy was at the service of Eden.

The American Tradition is often more concerned with the similar manifestations of the Garden than with the differences that the gardens present. Thus the American Studies approach that links Puritan intellectual thought with Jeffersonian politics often leaves gaping blank spaces in the American "big picture." That the South and New England existed together under the rubric "democracy" only point out that the term had for Americans, as it has throughout political history, different meanings. That the descendants of Plymouth and

Jamestown could subscribe together to the litany, "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," indicates that the terms were large enough to hold often radically different opinions of what these terms meant, and were abstract enough to avoid immediate confrontation over those differences.

Even today, with the almost total destruction of indigenous folklore by mass media culture and with the uniformity of local economics brought about by technological advances and national and multi-national corporations, Americans still recognize America as a confederation of regions and regional attitudes. Accessible transportation has not removed the exoticism of place. At no time is region more prominent than in the selection of a political party's candidate for president in which the candidate to be considered viable, must be able to win primaries in regional blocks--the Midwest, New England, and the South.

That America, a country the size of Central Europe, should be a country of marked regional differences is not surprising. In fact, the American traveler is often as surprised to hear a generalization about "Americans" as a Frenchman would be to hear himself included in a remark about Europeans. Certainly to speak of America is to speak of a people politically, socially, and economically more homogeneous than the people of the

Common Market. But Van Wyck Brooks' call for a "usable past" was a recognition that the shared American past was indeed barely strong enough to sustain an "American Tradition" in letters.

The problem was, of course, one for critics, teachers, social scientists--those who were asked to or felt compelled to present a unified American Tradition. Writers had found a past that was usable, rich, and varied, and many of these writers had found, have found, and will continue to find in their regions the unshared mythological pasts, the communal consciousness that frames and informs their works, and which makes our shared history, such as Grant's meeting with Lee at Appomattox Courthouse, resonate with new meanings.

Footnotes to Chapter I

<sup>1</sup> Shelby Foote, The Civil War: A Narrative (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 946.

<sup>2</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant (New York: Webster, 1886).

<sup>3</sup> Sherman, in his Personal Memoirs of General William T. Sherman, 4th ed. (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1899), II, 377, describes his own troops as "The most magnificent army in existence" in his account of the Grand Review in Washington. Before the March Sherman had worried that his rag-tag fighting men would look ridiculous following the spit-and-polish Army of the Potomac.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American History (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1920); Howard W. Odum and Harry Estill Moore, American Regionalism: A Cultural-Historical Approach to National Integration (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1938).

<sup>5</sup> Odum, p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> Odum, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Odum, p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> Donald Davidson, The Attack on Leviathan, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1938).

<sup>9</sup> The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is associated through Odum and Charles B. Aycock with the "New South" movement in Southern reform. Vanderbilt University in Nashville was the seat of the "Fugitives," Tate, Ransom, Wade, Young, Davidson, Lytle, and Warren.

<sup>10</sup> Allen Tate, "The New Provincialism," in Essays of Four Decades (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1968), pp. 535-546.

<sup>11</sup> Tate, "Provincialism," p. 539.

<sup>12</sup> Tate, "Provincialism," p. 539.

<sup>13</sup> Hamlin Garland, "Provincialism," in Crumbling Idols (1894), (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1960), p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> Hamlin Garland, "New Fields," in Idols, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> Donald Davidson, "Regionalism and Nationalism," in Still Rebels, Still Yankees and Other Essays (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1957), pp. 270-71.

<sup>16</sup> Davidson, "Regionalism," p. 277.

<sup>17</sup> Flannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," in Mystery and Manners, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), pp. 34-35.

<sup>18</sup> If this hypothetical observer remained long enough in the South he would come to see that there are many Souths, as well, just as he would find multiple divisions within any Southern state; but he also would see, I think, that those many Souths as a division of The South are not as radical as the divisions between the South and the United States.

<sup>19</sup> William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust (New York: Random House, 1948), pp. 194-195.

<sup>20</sup> Louis Bromfield, The Green Bay Tree (New York: Frederick Stokes Co., 1924), p. 107.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Penn Warren, Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1980), p. 59.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Sharp, "From Poverty to Prosperity," in The Heritage of the Middle West, ed. John J. Murray (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1958), pp. 54-72; Ray Allen Billington, "The Garden of the World: Fact and Fiction," in Murray, Heritage, pp. 27-53; John D. Hicks, "A Political Whirlpool," in Murray, Heritage, pp. 73-96).

<sup>23</sup> Twelve Southerners, I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930). The Twelve Southerners are J.C. Ransom, D. Davidson, F.L. Owsley, J.G. Fletcher, L.H. Lanier, Allen Tate, H.C. Nixon, A.N. Lytle, R.P. Warren, J.D. Wade, H.B. Kline, Stark Young.

<sup>24</sup> Allen Tate, "Ode to the Confederate Dead," in Collected Poems 1919-1976 (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1977), p. 21.

<sup>25</sup> Craig Watson, "I'll Take My Flight: The Village Lost and Found," in "Habit of Mind: Studies in the Literature of the Middle West of the Twentieth Century," Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1980.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Ruland, The Rediscovery of American Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1967), p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Van Wyck Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," The Dial, 11 April 1918, pp. 337-41.

<sup>28</sup> Brooks, "Past," p. 340.

<sup>29</sup> Howard Mumford Jones, The Theory of American Literature (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1948).

<sup>30</sup> R.W.B. Lewis, The American Adam (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1955); Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

<sup>31</sup> Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1950).

## CHAPTER II

### REGIONALISM AND ROMANCE: COOPER, HAWTHORNE, AND SIMMS

For the nineteenth-century American writer, there was one great story until 1860--the settlement of the American frontier and the subsequent development of American society--what Charles Olsen has labeled "the history of the last first people in the world."<sup>1</sup> It was a story begun in the journals of John Smith and Sir Walter Raleigh, and referred to by Shakespeare in The Tempest; it was the adventure that fascinated Tocqueville, Chateaubriand, Crèvecoeur, and others. It was the story undertaken by three of America's best romancers: James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and William Gilmore Simms.

Cooper, Hawthorne, and Simms share much in common as writers. All three wrote frontier and Revolutionary War fiction. All were theorists of as well as practitioners of the romance form. All were strong proponents for the recognition of American literature. Yet, to read Cooper's Leatherstocking tales, Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, and Simms' The Yemassee is to experience the frontiers of three different Americas--places

that are vastly different in climate, geography, social organization, and, most importantly, in the values and concerns of the people. To read these novels is to experience America as nation, America as New England, and America as the South.

The famous complaint Cooper voices in Notions of the Americans (1828) of the plight of the American writer of Cooper's time, sounds remarkably similar to the position Van Wyck Brooks articulates in "On Creating a Usable Past":

There is scarcely an ore which contributes to the wealth of an author, that is found, here, in veins as rich as in Europe. There are no annals for the historian; no follies (beyond the most vulgar and common-place) for the satirist; no manners for the dramatist; no obscure fictions for the writers of romance; no gross and hardy offenses against decorum for the moralist; nor any of the rich auxiliaries for poetry. . . . I have never seen a nation so alike in my life as the people of the United States, and what is more, they are not only like each other, but they are remarkably like that which common sense tells them they ought to resemble. . . .

All attempts to blend history with romance in America have been comparatively failures, (and perhaps unfortunately) since the subjects are too familiar to be treated with the freedom that the imagination absolutely requires.<sup>2</sup>

Three decades later, in his preface to The Marble Faun (1860), Hawthorne makes a similar complaint:

No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no



antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land. It will be very long, I trust, before romance-writers may find congenial and easily handled themes, either in the annals of our stalwart republic, or in any characteristic and probable events of our individual lives. Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wall-flowers, need ruin to make them grow.<sup>3</sup>

Simms, however, found no lack of mystery, legends, annals, and "ruin"--the stuff which according to Cooper and Hawthorne, romance is made of. In Simms, there is no complaint voiced about his materials. In fact, Vernon Parrington criticizes Simms for his prodigality of invention; of Simms' best-known novel, The Yemassee (1835), Parrington remarks, "A wealth of romantic materials is crowded into the volume, enough to serve Cooper for half a dozen tales."<sup>4</sup>

Considering the contribution of these two writers to the development of an indigenous American literature, no matter how familiar Cooper and Hawthorne's disparagements of their native materials may be, it is nevertheless hard for a modern reader to believe these dyspeptic invectives as anything more than the obligatory self-deprecations of an Humble Servant addressing his Dear Reader. Yet, such remarks are not found in the prefaces of another important writer of historical romance in pre-Civil War American literature--Simms. Why not?

The answer, in part, can be found in Simms's dedication to his 1856 edition of The Wigwam and the Cabin:

One word for the material of these legends. It is local, sectional,--and to be national in literature, one needs to be sectional. No one mind can fully or fairly illustrate the characteristics of any great country; and he who shall depict one section faithfully, has made his proper and sufficient contribution to the great work of national literature.<sup>5</sup>

Simms' contention here that American literature is the aggregate of regional literatures sets him apart from Hawthorne and Cooper in the theory of American literature, Simms' insistence on America as a collection of regions voices a theory of sectional literature that will find its most complete expression forty years later in Hamlin Garland's regional literary manifesto, Crumbling Idols (1894).<sup>6</sup> What is most important to note here is that Simms' South provides him with a wealth of materials that Hawthorne and Cooper find insufficient in their attempts to describe a nation.

Certainly Simms, Hawthorne, and, in some ways, Cooper were all regional writers; and certainly all aspired to be national writers as well. Yet, of the three, only Simms equated being a national writer with being a regional one. In doing so, he could make use of regional differences as well as national similarities

and therefore always had before him a wealth of materials he found usable for romantic fiction.

It is Cooper's insistence on Americans as a single people in a single society that leads him finally to his statement, "I have never seen a people so much alike as the people of the United States." In Rob Roy, for example, Cooper's literary idol, Sir Walter Scott, could draw multiple distinctions between highlanders, midlanders, and lowlanders. In America, a century before Cooper, William Byrd could delineate differences between North Carolinians and Virginians. But Cooper's main distinctions are finally made between whites and Indians--red men and Americans.

I do not mean that Cooper was insensible to regional distinctions; as novels of manners, his Satanstoe trilogy, for example, minutely describe his New York culture. It is rather as a writer of historical romance that Cooper's demand for American archetypes for the American frontier story leads him to his complaint against his American materials. With Cooper, it is not so much the richness of the "ore," as he states in his 1828 complaint, but rather a question of the quantity of that ore available for the particular form of romance he wishes to write. Viewed as a single culture, America must have indeed seemed a weak mine for him; looking for

El Dorado, he saw few nuggets here worthy of his attention.

In one sense, the wilderness, the setting for most of the action of the Leatherstocking novels, is precisely the place where American is not, and when that setting becomes the frontier settlement and hence no longer a wilderness, Cooper, like Natty Bumppo moves on. Like his woodsman, Cooper is at his weakest in the settlements. Throughout the Leatherstocking saga, and especially in The Pioneers, Cooper attempts to people his novels with a cross section of white Americans, but these men and women are differentiated more by accent than by differences in culture and, except for vicissitudes of moral character, are readily distinguishable mainly as whites or non-indians. In Cooper's novels we see the American Frontier Story played out by archetypes, noble savages and heroic woodsmen doomed by the very encroachment of civilization that Cooper laments as a romancer and lauds as New Yorker.

If Cooper's frontier romances seem more generalized than those of Hawthorne or Simms, the reason may be attributed to the form of the romance which Cooper was attempting and the views of history that that form implies. Cooper often voices his debts to Sir Walter Scott and Cooper's Leatherstocking tales, like Scott's Waverly novels, are more concerned with the effects of

historical forces upon the characters of the romance than with the effect of the characters upon history. Like Scott, Cooper chooses for his novels a time in which an old order is giving way to a new one; in the *Leatherstocking Tales*, the time in which the wilderness is giving way to the settlement. Like Scott's heroes, Natty Bumppo is caught between two worlds--that of the pioneer and that of the settler. Rather than ultimately influencing that world, Bumppo is finally doomed by it. He is a man caught out of place between the world of the Indian which preceded him and the world of the frontier settlement which succeeds him. Like Scott's heroes and heroines, *Leatherstocking* is the victim of historical progression rather than the author of it.

But unlike Scott's novels, Natty Bumppo's story does not finally take place in one specific place in one specific time, but rather in a progression of times--from the 1740s to the 1800s--and a progression of places--from the woods of upstate New York to the Middle Western prairies. The dilemma facing Cooper as romancer was quite different from any problem Scott encountered. Where Scott could select a specific national event, Cooper must find a regional one and try to nationalize it. The events of Scott's novels are played out in a completed past; the events of Cooper's *Leatherstocking* saga were past only for a regional history. The story

of the frontier though completed in New York, was still occurring in the West. The opening of the Iowa territory in 1833 coincides with the midpoint of Cooper's authorship of the five novels. And the national story continued to the settlement of California and its admission to the Union in 1850, and then back eastward to the Oklahoma landrush of 1899.

Where Scott could draw upon a completed past and situate his novels at the moments when historical and philosophical forces coalesced, Cooper found himself confronted with a nation's history of dynamic linear expansion--one in which the events of the past of his own region, New York, were taking place in the present in the western regions of the country. The historical theories of Scott, the stories of the historical character doomed by the conflict of historical forces in the moment, were finally unavailable to Cooper. Natty's kind is not ultimately doomed until the twentieth century and thus he has the option that Scott's theory and form does not allow--he can run until the moment exhausts him, but not until he exhausts the moment.<sup>7</sup>

When Cooper writes in 1828 that "All attempts to blend history with romance have been comparatively failures," the comparison is with the historical romance as practiced by Scott. The "failure" of Cooper's Leatherstocking tales, and indeed the implication of

failure is relative only to what Cooper wished to accomplish and not to the enduring work he produced, lies in the inadequacy of the form of the romance he wished to use to tell the story he wished to tell. Cooper's allegiance to the Scottian romance and its theory of historical forces, and the uniquely American situation Cooper confronted in a national history that completed itself not over time but over distance, perhaps explain why Cooper felt compelled to deprecate the romantic materials available to him. If, as modern readers, we are puzzled now by Cooper's self-condemnation, it is because the story Cooper wished to tell has been completed for us in the past, but was incomplete for Cooper.

Cooper was the only major writer to attempt to work out the Scottian romance on a consciously national scale; Simms and Hawthorne, in their best work, are distinctly regional romancers.

Hawthorne, like Simms, found in his region the history, manners and obscure fictions which Cooper claimed eluded his nation. Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter and The House of the Seven Gables are stories of New England, its society and history. Hawthorne's original and unpublished collection of stories was to have been entitled Seven Tales of My Native Land, and was to have contained exclusively New England stories.

Like Simms, Hawthorne, as romancer, found the histories and legends of his region to be rich in material.

As C. Hugh Holman has pointed out, Hawthorne and Simms were adamant in their insistence on the separation of the romance and the novel as descriptions of fictional forms, and both were strikingly similar in their definitions of that separation.<sup>8</sup> Simms, in his preface to the 1853 edition of The Yemassee, and Hawthorne, in his preface to The House of the Seven Gables (1860), both firmly distinguish between the realism and fidelity to probability required by the novel, and the licenses of history and legend permitted by the romance. Though Hawthorne shows little of Simms' "epic" impulse in his fiction, Simms would certainly agree with Hawthorne's contention about the romance:

The point of view in which this Tale comes under the Romantic definition, lies in the attempt to connect a by-gone time with the Present that is flitting away from us. It is a legend, prolonging itself, from an epoch now gray in the distance, down to our own broad daylight, and bringing along with it some of its legendary mist.<sup>9</sup>

To read Hawthorne and Simms together is to see the use that each writer makes of a completed regional past, and how that past is projected in the regional mind of the present. Certainly, most historical fiction is as much about the time in which it is written as it is about the time in which the action of the story takes



place. The past which the writer presents, or more specifically, the attitude of the author toward the past as he depicts it, is a product of the present that the author experiences. It is not so much history as it is history made meaningful.

It is not surprising then that Simms, in his fictional accounts of South Carolina history, particularly in The Partisan (1835), Mellichampe (1836) and The Scout (1841), shows the American Revolution as a class struggle in which the American heroes are generally the patrician upperclass farmers and the mercenary loyalists are lower class whites and immigrants of non-British background. The conflicts of Simms' Revolution are the same conflicts of the South in the 1830's and 40's and those which will eventually be the causes for the Civil War.<sup>10</sup> Hawthorne's Revolutionary Tales, particularly "The Gray Champion" and "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," are, conversely, stories of a middle class reaction to the oppression by the few. To read Simms and Hawthorne as history, is to see that by 1839 New England and the South had apparently fought two different Revolutionary Wars, both of them American.

One is almost inclined to forget that The Scarlet Letter is a frontier novel even though Roger Chillingworth is recently ransomed from the Indians. Glimpses of frontier life are rare in the novel and are most

noticeable in the opening scaffold scene and in the spectators who come to Salem for the Election Day ceremonies. But the forest, Hawthorne's symbol of the wilderness--the home of the "Black Man," the playground of the elf-child Pearl, and the place of assignation for Hester and Dimmesdale--broods over the novel. The actual frontier of the novel is Hawthorne's metaphor for the frontier of the human heart--the middle point between the freedom of the forest and the restraints of community morality.<sup>11</sup>

As Stanley Williams, F.O. Matthiessen and others have pointed out, Hawthorne's obsession with individual sin and the ultimate cleansing power of the community is a legacy of Puritan thought and indicative of what might be called the New England "mind." Williams gives an excellent summary of Hawthorne as a New England writer:

We can understand New England without Hawthorne; yet Hawthorne without New England we cannot comprehend. She was literally of his blood and brain; her scenes and people form the stuff of his romances, and his own forefathers revisit the upper shades in his pages. .

. . . Yes, it was the breath in his nostrils, this study of an invisible world, of whose existence he was in his way as firmly convinced as were Emerson and Thoreau. . . . That curiosity concerning the two fundamental relationships, Man to God and Man to Man, which motivated the literature of New England, he shared, though his conclusions were neutral, inconclusive, even pessimistic.<sup>12</sup>

Hawthorne's New England is a moral as well as a physical location. As Simms' novels amplify the political concerns of his South, so Hawthorne's romances are set within the intellectual sphere of New England. It is not surprising that Hawthorne's frontier differs greatly in more than time, location and climate from Simms'; they are portraits of two distinctly regional cultures.<sup>13</sup>

Hawthorne's complaint concerning America's lack of "antiquity," "mystery," and "picturesque and gloomy wrongs" in his preface to The Marble Faun seems to show him as having changed in his position in the ten years between the publication of that novel in 1860 and his "Custom-House" sketch which introduces The Scarlet Letter (1850). In "The Custom-House," Hawthorne's narrator can find an old symbol in the attic of the Salem custom-house and, via "the moonlight of imagination," weave a powerful romance from it. A decade later, he complains of a lack of materials. His deprecation, however, is not that of a maturing author who discounts his juvenilia of a decade ago; rather it is the statement of a writer who is attempting to abjure the regional in favor of the international. What Hawthorne may have discovered from the economic failure of The Marble Faun was that what was regionally powerful was not internationally translatable. Rather than a

romance of Europe as he intended, Hawthorne's novel remains a romance of Americans in Europe and, like the Italians of "Rappaccini's Daughter," Hawthorne's Americans are fundamentally the characters of his New England romances who play out their parts against an exotic background. The weakness of The Marble Faun can perhaps be credited to Hawthorne's failure to adjust the moral climate of the novel to its international setting. Henry James was later to recognize the impossibility of such an adjustment and to use it as a major theme in The American, Portrait of a Lady, and The Ambassadors.

Referring to a chapter of Simms' Views and Reviews in American Literature (1846), Simms' Young America manifesto, Hawthorne asserts: "We cannot help feeling that the real treasures of his subject have escaped the author's notice. The themes suggested by him, viewed as he views them, would produce nothing but historical novels, cast in the same worn out mould that has been in use thirty years, and which it is time to break up and fling away."<sup>14</sup> Such a statement helps to illuminate the differences in the romance both as Simms and Hawthorne practiced it, and as Hawthorne practiced it successfully in The Scarlet Letter and less successfully in The Marble Faun.

Simms' advocacy of fidelity to an actual historical event and to the depiction of manners and customs was at

odds with Hawthorne's view of the romance which is centered on the exploration of an invisible moral world and is less bound to historical actualities. Yet, in The Scarlet Letter and The House of the Seven Gables, Hawthorne's use of New England history and legend is what validates and makes possible Hawthorne's examination of the Puritan mind. Without the historical underpinnings, or to use T.S. Eliot's term "the objective correlative," which such locating provides him, Hawthorne's examinations would lose much of their power and even their credibility, as The Marble Faun exemplifies.

Simms' and Hawthorne's practice of the romance is consistent with the mind of their regions. Hawthorne's famous "Custom-House" definition of the romance as "a neutral territory, where the Actual and the Imaginary meet," is a definition in Puritan thought of the real frontier as the place where the "invisible world" may shape the community--a place where the actualities of the world are at the service of mind, belief, or faith. It is an idea found in Emerson's "transparent eyeball" and later in the poetry of Robert Frost--"The land was ours before we were the land's."<sup>15</sup> The dwellers in Hawthorne's Salem in The Scarlet Letter live on this intellectual frontier between the forest--the realm of superstition--and England--the epitome of godless

civilization. The historical romance of Scott and its subsequent variations in Cooper and Simms finally has little in common with Hawthorne's depiction of a region whose controlling ideas and metaphors are ahistorical. From Jonathan Edwards' moral laws to Emerson's moral sense, Puritan thought and its subsequent manifestations in the New England mind were concerned finally with absolutes more than with circumstances. To reiterate Williams, "We can understand New England without Hawthorne; yet Hawthorne without New England we cannot comprehend." The regional context is as important to Hawthorne as to the reader.

This belief in the absolute has underlying it a necessary devaluation of the importance of the historical moment, except as that moment occasions the moral confrontation. Hawthorne's romance is ultimately a story of interior rather than of exterior events, a form which will find its most extreme expression in Melville's Moby-Dick. What Hawthorne chooses for his romantic materials, the supernatural and the legendary, are often metaphorical expressions for a moral, or at least a psychological, state of mind. For this reason, many modern readers have argued for Hawthorne as less a practitioner of the romance and more as a pioneer in psychological realism in fiction. This concern with the invisible world suggests clearly the reasons for Henry

James' admiration for Hawthorne. One does not have to look hard to see Hawthorne and his New England heritage in James' novels. Isabel Archer and Lambert Strether are the direct descendants of Hester Prynne. They are all the inheritors of a New England tradition.

Simms' practice of the romance is closer in form to Cooper's and to Scott's than to Hawthorne's, but the ways in which Simms' historical romance differs from Scott's and Cooper's is indicative of the influence of his region on his work. They also suggest that the romantic tendencies of Southern literature have their roots in a view of history which is augmented by but not born of the defeat of the Confederacy in the Civil War.

Simms delineates these differences in his essay entitled "The Writings of James Fenimore Cooper" in Views and Reviews in American Literature, History, and Fiction. Simms lauds Cooper for his championing of America as a topic for the historical romance, for "having struck the vein, and convinced the people not only that there was gold in the land, but that the gold in the land was good."<sup>16</sup> "To Mr. Cooper," Simms wrote, "the merit is due, of having first awakened us to this self-reference,--to this consciousness of mental resources, of which our provincialism dealt, not only in constant doubts, but in constant denials."<sup>17</sup>

Yet, Simms finds much to criticize in Cooper and Scott as well. Simms has little patience with the Scottian formula of a hero caught and buffeted by historical forces beyond his control--a formula, as I have suggested, which Cooper inherits in his novels. Simms declares:

. . . Mr. Cooper surrenders himself to the progress of events. He leaves one to beget the other. Hence, the desultory character of his writings; the violence of transition; the strange neglect to which certain of his characters are destined, in whom he at first strives to interest us; the hard scramble, which the persons of the drama are compelled to make, each to get to his proper place, for the tableau vivant, at the falling of the curtain. . . . The whole machinery here is feeble, and a writer of romance cannot more greatly err than when he subjects his hero to the continual influence of events. We have no respect for heroes placed always in subordinate positions--sent hither and thither--baffled by every breath of circumstance--creatures without will, and constantly governed by the caprices of other persons. This was the enfeebling characteristic in Scott's heroes.<sup>18</sup>

In his preface to the 1853 edition of The Yemassee, Simms contends "The modern romance is the substitute which the people of the present day offer for the ancient epic. The form is changed; the matter is very much the same."<sup>19</sup> Inherent in Simms' contention is the difference his use of the romance form has with Scott's; he is not telling the story of an historical period alone, but rather the history of a people and their



society. Simms is often more social historian than romancer, and his characters influence rather than are influenced by the course of history. The Yemassee, the only Simms novel which is still regularly read by students of American literature, is the story of the defeat of one civilization by another--the 1715 defeat of the Yemassee Indians by the South Carolina settlers. Simms' concern with "civilization" and his often obsessive fidelity to historical fact separate Simms' frontier romance from those of Cooper. In Simms' judgment, Cooper's romances lack (1) a diversity of characters to portray the society of the American frontier and (2) a complexity of plot and historical fact that coalesce to show the importance of the historical moment described. These faults, according to Simms, are what lead Cooper to his complaint against his American materials:

Mr. Cooper entertained a notion, expressed in some one or more of his prefaces, that the literary material of his own country was too limited and too deficient in variety, to admit of frequent employment. He thought it too easily exhausted, and though he did not say so, it was very evident, at that time, that he thought he himself had already exhausted it. We scarcely need to say that we think all this a very great error. In Mr. Cooper's hands, no doubt, there would be a want of variety; not because of any deficiency in the material, but, simply, because the mind of Mr. Cooper is too limited in its grasp. It is too individual in its aims and agencies,--does not vary, but rather multiplies the same forms, characters, images and objects, through different media--now enlarging and now depressing them--now throwing them into greater shadow,

and now bringing them out into stronger light--seldom entirely discarding them for others, and we should think not easily capable of doing so. His characters are uniformly the same, his incidents are seldom varied;--the whole change which he effects in his story, consists in new combinations of the same circumstances, heightened, now and then, by auxiliary events, which are seldom of much additional importance. In Indian life and sailor life, he was almost uniformly successful--for the simple reason, that such stories called simply for the display of individual character. They enabled him to devote his genius, as would always be the desire of his mind, to a single object. . . . To manage the progress of one leading personage, and to concentrate in his portraiture his whole powers, has been the invariable secret of Mr. Cooper's success. We very soon lose interest in his subordinates. Take away from his stories one or two of the personages, and the rest are the merest puppets.<sup>20</sup>

This concentration on the individual as emblematic of a society and its history is anathema to Simm's "epic" theory of the historical romance. In Views and Reviews, Simms carefully divides the historical romance into two literary provinces--that of the historian and that of the poet. Simms emphasizes the role of the historian, warning that fidelity to the historical moment is of ultimate importance because "if the ordinary citizen is at liberty to contravene your facts and premises, there is necessarily an end to your story."<sup>21</sup> Given Simms "epic" and, therefore, social, intentions for the romance, such a response from the reader must be avoided. He continues:

There must be a faith accorded to the poet equally with the historian, or his scheme fails of effect. The privileges of the romancer only begin where those of the historian cease. It is on neutral ground alone, that, differing from the usual terms of warfare, as carried on by other conquerors, his greatest successes are to be found.<sup>22</sup>

Like Hawthorne, Simms defines the romance as a "neutral" territory, but unlike Hawthorne's definition "where the Actual and the Imaginary meet" (italics mine), for Simms, the Actual or Historical and the Imaginary are at war, with history having the strongest hand. This is not history in the service of art, but rather art in the service of social history.

In The Yemassee, Simms weaves together essentially three important stories. The connecting story is the historical event--the 1715 uprising of the Yemassee Indians over a land dispute with the South Carolina settlers, and their subsequent defeat outside the Charleston settlement by a militia force led by Governor Charles Craven. The second story is the fall of Indian civilization, portrayed in the inflexibility of Sanutee, the Yemassee chief, in the corruption of his son, Occonestoga, by his contact with the white man, and in the heroism and love shown by Matiwan, Occonestoga's mother, who kills her son to prevent his dishonor before the tribe. The third story is that of the white settlers--the love plot of Captain Gabriel Harrison (who is

later discovered to be the incognito Governor Charles Craven) and a settlement girl, Bes Matthews; the rather stock capture--escape--pursuit--rescue adventure of Harrison among the Indians, and the defense of the settlement "Block-House" stockade by the whites. Though uneven and hackneyed in places, The Yemassee has a power which comes from Simms' ability constantly to weave together the line of each story into a fast paced and moving novel.

In Views and Reviews, Simms declares that "the usual and grand defect in all Mr. Cooper's stories" is that "In truth, there is very little story."

He seems to exercise none of his genius in the invention of his fable. There is none of that careful grouping of means to ends, and all, to the one end of denouement, which is so remarkably distinguished in the genius of Scott, and made all the parts of his story fit as compactly as the work of the joiner,--but he seems to hurry forward in the delineation of scene after scene, as if wholly indifferent to the catastrophe. The consequence is, that his catastrophe is usually forced and unsatisfactory. He is, for this reason, compelled frequently, at the close, to begin the work of invention;--to bring out some latent matter,--to make unlocked for discoveries, and prove his hero, be he hunter or pirate, to have been the son of somebody of unexpected importance;--a discovery which, it is fancied, will secure him [the hero] a greater degree of the reader's<sup>23</sup> favour, than he could have before commanded.

Given the revelation of Gabriel Harrison's identity at the end of The Yemassee, Simms' vehemence is certainly suspect. But Simms' novel is the careful work of "a

joiner." Each story line has its own integrity and each is fitted together well, with the possible exception of the final defeat of the Yemassee outside Charleston, an episode which serves more as an historical afterword than as part of the novel proper. Simms' use of history is more than a frame for the story. As Simms himself mentions in his preface, many of the events of the story lines, though transported, are well documented in historical accounts of the uprising.<sup>24</sup>

Simms' insistence on the role of history in the romance and on the role of the romance as modern epic suggests a use of the romance which is different from the purposes of Hawthorne and Cooper. In proclaiming The Yemassee "an American romance," Simms was insisting on his story as an epic--the story of a nation and its people.<sup>25</sup> "The artist alone is the true historian," he declared, adding "It is by such artists that nations live."<sup>26</sup> The epic impulse, according to Robert Kellogg and Robert Scholes, "is not an historical one, nor a creative one; it is re-creative."<sup>27</sup> The epic is written within an implied tradition and links society to that tradition; in other words, it is a narrative form with a social and public purpose which goes beyond the actual telling of the story itself. Simms' linking of the epic and the romance announces his political intention in the use of the romance form. His South Carolinian settlers

are the inheritors of a tradition and culture which stretched back to Homer and Virgil and that tradition is recast and retold to coincide with the values of his South of 1835. Hence, for Simms, the social values of the novel are not only justified by the specific historical event described, but also by Western tradition, and not only justified for a region but also for a nation and a race as well.

Vernon Parrington writes of Simms:

If there could have only been a little more of the intellectual in him, if he could have detached himself as an artist from the immediate and present, he might have risen superior to his unfortunate environment. . . . He must be a partisan to a people and a cause, rather than to his art. The South he loved was romantic, and he would appeal to the world as a Southerner. . . . He never realized what a clutter of useless baggage he carried into his study. It is a pity that he constricted himself to the shell of an outworn order, instead of realizing that social orders and institutions are significant to the artist only as he stands apart from them, observing their ways and considering their interplay in the life of men and women. It was a major loss to American letters that he should not have striven to be artist first, and a Southern romantic<sup>28</sup> only at a later and more convenient season.

Perhaps Parrington is right that, had Simms striven to be more a national and less a regional writer, in other words, to be like Cooper, both the quality and the value of Simms' work to American literature, as Parrington defines it, would be much greater. But Parrington

ignores the vital issue of Simms' work--that Simms' America is the South--and, in doing so, fails to understand that the very strength of Simms' work which he does admire is, like Hawthorne's, the result of a response to a regional culture. Simms could hardly ignore his "unfortunate environment"; it was not only the focus of but also the prime mover behind his work. Simms' theory and practice of the romance are the direct result of the "immediate and present" of his region. He could hardly have appealed to the world as anyone else but a Southerner.

The fire-eating secessionist Simms of the 1850s is much different from the Simms of the 1830s who opposed South Carolina's Nullification Doctrine and was for a time quite unpopular in Charleston for his vocal support of Andrew Jackson's policies. But to see Simms as a proponent of Jacksonian democracy is also misleading. Simms loved the United States and he loved the South; he never questioned the correctness of the nullification ordinance so much as the wisdom of it. As late of 1842, Simms described himself in a letter as being "an ultra-American, a Born Southron, and a resolute loco-foco."<sup>29</sup> Like many Southerners, including John C. Calhoun, Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, and William Fitzhugh, Simms believed in the rights of individual states to determine their own laws, and like many Southerners, subscribed to

the idea of a Greek democracy in which all citizens but not all men were accorded equality. As suspect as this particular notion of democracy may seem, the tendency to align the South with Greek or Roman culture is clearly present not only in Simms' equation of the romance with the epic, but also throughout much of Southern literature, finding its strongest modern restatements in the essays and poetry of Allen Tate.<sup>30</sup> Simms' avowed purpose in The Yemassee is to present a modern epic, and at core the novel is about the most pressing issue of the South in Simms' day--racial supremacy.

Perplexing to some is Simms' compassionate and thorough treatment of the Yemassee Indians. Unlike Cooper's Indians who are invariably archetypes, "good" or "bad", Simms' Yemassee tribe possesses a complex cross section of human flaws and virtues. The Indians have their virtual counterparts in the white settlement, and Matiwan, in the sacrifice of her son, achieves a level of noble pathos and courage unequaled by any other character in the novel. Throughout The Yemassee, the fall of the Indians is treated as a genuinely tragic event with all attendant pathos--but as Simms makes clear, it is an inevitable and necessary tragedy.

The first chapter of The Yemassee succinctly shows the height and the inevitable collapse of the Yemassee dynasty.



In 1715, the Yemassees were in all their glory. They were politic and brave--a generous and gallant race. The whites had been welcomed at their first coming to their woods, and hospitably entertained; and gradually lost all their apprehensions, from the gentleness, and the forbearance of the red man. . . . Until this period the Yemassees had never been troubled by that worst tyranny of all, the consciousness of their inferiority to a power of which they, at length, grew jealous. . . . Their chiefs began to show signs of discontent, if not of disaffection, and the great mass of their people assumed a sullenness of habit and demeanor, which had never marked their conduct before. . . . Another and stronger ground for jealous dislike arose necessarily in their minds with the gradual approach of that consciousness of their inferiority which, while the colony was dependent and weak, they had not so readily perceived. But, when they saw with what facility the new comers could convert even the elements, not less than themselves, into slaves and agents, under the guidance of the strong will and overseeing judgment, the gloom of their habit swelled into ferocity, and their minds were busied with those subtle schemes and stratagems with which, in his nakedness, the savage usually seeks to neutralize the superiority of European armour. . . . A turn in the river unfolds to our sight a cottage, standing by itself, half finished and probably deserted by its capricious owner. Opposite, on the other bank of the river, an Indian dries his bearskin in the sun, while his infant wrapped in another, and lashed down upon a board--for security, not for symmetry--hands rocking from the tree. . . .

The white settlers of Simms' novel are not only inherently superior, they are actually superior. They are not only intellectually above the Indians but are the better woodsmen and fighters as well. Simms' Indians are not Cooper's supermen. In the second chapter of The

Yemassee, Sanutee, the chief of the tribe and its most renowned warrior, is bested at deer hunting by the piratical Chorley, and then is bested again by Chorley in hand-to-hand combat. The noblest of the Indian race is no match for the most degenerate of the whites, and the Indians' failure to put themselves into Harrison's protection leads them to be duped by Chorley into opposing the whites. As the fallen Occonestoga attests, the Indians are sadly but inevitably corrupted by the presence of a superior race.

The tragedy of the Yemassees' downfall and the inherent nobility which they show, in spite of their corruption, are necessary to the epic quality which Simms wishes to achieve in the story. The Indians are worthy foes. Their inevitable doom does not mitigate their tragic elevation but rather validates their downfall as tragic. They die bravely, and their defeat elevates their conquerors.<sup>32</sup> If the Indian cannot survive in freedom the superiority of the white race, he dies with honor and a peaceful resignation to necessity. He loses his world without forsaking it or cheapening it, as Sanutee's dying speech to Matiwan expresses:

It is good, Matiwan. The well-beloved has no people. The Yemassee has bones thick in the woods, and there are no young braves to sing the song of his glory. The Coosah-moray-te [Governor Craven] is on the bosom of the Yemassee, with the foot of the great bear of Apalachia. He makes his bed in the old home

of Pocota-ligo (the Yemassee village], like a fox that burrows in the hill-side. We may not drive him away. It is good for Sanutee to die with his people. Let the song of his dying be sung.<sup>33</sup>

The nobility of the Indian, who was virtually extinct as a cultural force in Simms' South of 1835, does not appear in the blacks of The Yemassee. The Indians are savage but admirable in their opposition to the whites; at the end of the story, the black slaves, momentarily released from the constraints of the whites, are brutally savage. After the whites defeat the Indians, the slaves begin a brutal wholesale slaughter of the survivors:

But the pursuers were at hand, in the negroes, now scouring the field of battle with their huge clubs and hatchets, knocking upon the head of all the Indians who yet exhibited any signs of life. As wild almost as the savages, they luxuriated in a pursuit to them so novel--they hurried over the forests with a step as fleet, and a ferocity as dreadful--sparing none, whether they fought or pleaded, and frequently inflicting the most unnecessary blows, even upon the dying and the dead.<sup>34</sup>

The final telling portraiture of the degeneracy of Simms' Negroes is their attack on the dying Sanutee and their attempt to slaughter Matiwan who is at Sanutee's side, a picture of fidelity. It is the noble victor, Governor Craven, who saves Matiwan and carries her "tenderly" away with all the respect due her nation.

Published just four years after Nat Turner's slave rebellion, The Yemassee's final scene bears all the fears of the South toward the prospect of the free black man. Like the red man, the black cannot exist in freedom with the whites, but unlike the Indian, Simms' black has no real heroic stature. Hector, Gabriel Harrison's servant, does give his master a warning which saves the white man's life, but in this his best quality, loyalty, Hector is equated with Harrison's dog, Dugdale, a fierce animal who is Hector's charge throughout the novel. Hector, in refusing the freedom which a grateful Harrison extends to him, mouths Simms' litany on the place of the Negro in society:

"I d--n to h-ll, maussa, ef I guine to be free!" roared the adhesive black, in a tone of unrestrainable determination. "I can't lose you company, and who de debble Dugdale guine let feed him like Hector? 'Tis onpossible, maussa, and dere's no use for talk 'bout it. De ting ain't right; and enty I know wha' kind of ting freedom is wid black man? Ha! you make Hector free, he turn wuss nor poor buckrah--he tief out of de shop--he git drunk and lie in de ditch--den, if sick come, he roll, he toss in de wet grass of de stable. You come in de morning, Hector dead--and, who know--he take no physic, he had no parson--who know, I say, maussa, but de debble fine em 'fore anybody else? No, maussa--you and Dugdale berry good company for Hector. <sup>35</sup>I tank God he so good--I no want any better."

Hector "knows his place"; it is only his close association with the superior white man that keeps his savagery

at bay. Without a master, Hector, like Dugdale, would be lost. His servitude is charitable to his character.

Just as Hawthorne's explorations of the hidden world of the psyche reflect the mind of his region, Simms' concern with social history and tradition reflects the heritage of his South. Implicit in his theory of the romance is the belief that the experiences of the past are the lessons and legacy of the present. For Simms, and for the public mind of his region in 1835, that lesson was of the historical, traditional, and social necessity of white supremacy for the South and for America.

In the frontier novels of Cooper, Hawthorne and Simms, we can see three different manifestations of the historical romance which constitute three different responses to the American settlement story--one national and two regional. Cooper, much more than Simms or Hawthorne, was committed to the idea of a single American experience, an experience which took place over distance rather than over time. Perhaps no other American writer was so convinced of or so powerfully conveyed the myth of the American as the new man in the new world as Cooper does in his Leatherstocking tales. No other American of Cooper's ability, with perhaps the exception of Thoreau, has so celebrated the individual character of the American. And certainly no other

character in American fiction so perfectly embodies the romantic Promethean archetype as Natty Bumppo. He is the first man of America, a man exquisitely lacking a past, born wholly new on a land which renews itself westward.<sup>36</sup> Natty Bumppo is not a New Yorker, a New Englander, a Southerner, or even a Westerner; he is firmly an American--the member of no society. Leatherstocking's saga, which takes place approximately between the years 1740 and 1804 could be moved fifty years or more forward or backward in time depending on the location of the novel with only a few changes in the historical backdrop. Cooper's complaint against his American historical materials for the romance is finally a bit ironic; probably no major practitioner of the historical romance has felt less bound to his specific historical context than Cooper was in his conception of Natty Bumppo's story.

Simms and Cooper are aligned on opposite sides of the Scottian formula of the fusion of history and art. With Simms, art is at the service of history; with Cooper, history serves art. Simms' concern is with the history and character of a society. Cooper's imagination, and his subject is finally not historical at all; Cooper's concern is mythic and larger than Simms'--the idea behind the history and character of a nation.

D.H. Lawrence comments on the mythic quality of the Leatherstocking saga:

True myth concerns itself integrally with the onward adventure of the integral soul. And this, for America, is Deerslayer. A man who turns his back on white society. A man who keeps his moral integrity hard and intact. . . . This is the very intrinsic-most American. He is at the core of all other flux and fluff.<sup>37</sup>

As Lawrence points out, Cooper's saga is not of America and its people but of The American, the mythic progenitor of The Land of the Free. Leatherstocking is bound by no region and by no social culture except his "whiteness." Even in his death scene in The Prairie, Leatherstocking has abjured the society of Ishmael Bush's entourage to die among the Indians who see him not as a representative of white society but as the representation of The White--The Pathfinder, The Deerslayer. Bush and the other "true" whites of the saga only encompass a small degree of the idea of which Leatherstocking is the complete embodiment. Cooper set out to write a national story and found that the national story he wished to tell was not of a people but of an archetypal individual.

Hawthorne and Simms in their regional romances are self-avowed American writers. But their Americas are different places, with different societies and different values. The Scarlet Letter and The Yemassee are fictional histories of New England and the South. They are

not the stories of their protagonists as much as they are stories of the relationship of those protagonists to their societies. As I have suggested, the form that these romances take and even their authors' definitions of the form are products of regional cultures. Given a history and a set of communal values, Hawthorne and Simms create in their fiction a completed past which explains and measures the world of their present. This relationship between history and culture in the formulation of a past which informs the present is what I wish to term the historical imagination.

The terms history and the past, as I am using them, are similar but not identical. History is the record of events, the fact; the past is the influence of those events on the present. In other words, the past in history interpreted and made meaningful. In this way, the past is connected with and dependent upon the present, and, perhaps, on the expectation of the future. To use Van Wyck Brooks' terms, the past is usable and believed, often in spite of history. The historical imagination is concerned with the past; it is the sense of the accumulation and influence of history in the present.<sup>38</sup>

For Simms and for Hawthorne, the romance provided the perfect literary mode for the expression of the historical imagination. Their regions provided them



with centuries of romantic historical materials (which their nation did not) and the "minds" of their separate regions provided them with valuations of that history. The differences in form that the romance took for each writer is a result of the different attitudes towards history that are implicit in the pasts of their respective regions.

As I have suggested, Hawthorne's view of history is, paradoxically, ahistorical. History is a moral continuum in which the absolute is manifest in the particular. The hidden moral world is of greater importance than the historical event which brings that invisible world into focus. The neutral territory where the Actual and the Imaginary meet is not only a definition of the creative process of romance, but also a definition of the way in which the past is created (history interpreted) by the historical imagination. It is a view of history which is particular to, though not necessarily exclusive of, the New England mind.

For Simms, history is a process, rather than a continuum, which validates the present moment via the past. History and social history are synonymous; history is the record of the continuing of civilization and tradition into the present. The romance provides a two-fold public purpose. It records the history of a people and their tradition, and it interprets that

history and applies it to the present. The past is the measurement of and the clarifier of the present moment.

That the romance survived and survives today in so much of Southern fiction has many causes. Sociologically, the South was not affected by the "melting pot" of immigration to the great extent that the Northeast, the Midwest, and the West were, and, thus, the South has remained a more indigenous region than most of the country. Industrialization has spread in the South at a much slower pace than in the rest of the nation and rural populations still predominate in the Southern states. But the South has retained its regional identity and its particular historical imagination in largest part because as the great national (and romantic) story of the American settlement became a national completed past, the South had experienced as region another story in a way different from the rest of the country--the Civil War. As C. Vann Woodward has eloquently explained and explored in The Burden of Southern History, the Southerner has inherited a past and an historical consciousness of that past which separates him from the rest of the country.<sup>39</sup>

In the controversies leading to the Civil War, in the war itself, and in the subsequent experience of Reconstruction, Southerners were created in their regional mind, and in the national mind, a separate

people. Well over a century of technological advances, social change, and national crises have done little to change the idea of the Southerner as different from the rest of Americans. As a result, the Southerner of today, like the Southerner of 1865, has a past alive in the present. And, importantly, that past is epic--the history of a people distinguished by their history from other American people. The Southern writer is conscious of the past, of the epic mythos of his region, of the necessity of confronting the past even in the technological present. The Civil War did not create the historical imagination of the South, but it continues to prolong it in the present when it has diminished in the rest of the country.

As I have suggested, the romance form results in part from the historical imagination--the constant confrontation of the past in the present--and, though the romance as a separate form of fiction has all but vanished in American letters, it is to this particular and inescapable and constant cognizance of the past, that the prevalence of romantic elements in Southern letters may, in large part, be attributed.

Footnotes to Chapter II

<sup>1</sup> Charles Olsen, Call Me Ishmael (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> James Fenimore Cooper, Notions of the Americans (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1828), Letter XXIII.

<sup>3</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, Preface, The Marble Faun, Vol. IV of The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. William Charvat et al. (Columbus Ohio State University Press, 1968), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Vernon Louis Parrington, Jr., Main Currents in American Thought, II (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1930), p. 129.

<sup>5</sup> William Gilmore Simms, The Wigwam and the Cabin (New York: J.S. Redfield, 1856), pp. 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Hamlin Garland, Crumbling Idols, ed. Jane Johnson (Cambridge, Belknap Press, 1960).

<sup>7</sup> The Leatherstocking novels were not written in a chronological order for Natty Bumppo's age. The publication date of The Prairie, which contains Leatherstocking's death, was 1827. Cooper revived his scout in The Pathfinder (1840) and The Deerslayer (1841). When Bumppo dies, the Middle West is still wilderness; when Cooper tells the two later stories of Bumppo's youth, the Middle West is becoming settled at a rapid rate.

<sup>8</sup> C. Hugh Holman, ed., The Yemassee, by William Gilmore Simms (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>9</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, The House of the Seven Gables, Vol II of The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. Fredson Bowers (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1965), p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> C. Hugh Holman, "William Gilmore Simms' Picture of the Revolution as a Civil War," The Roots of Southern Writing (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), pp. 35-49.

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the presence of the frontier in The Scarlet Letter, see Edwin Fussell, Frontier: American Literature and the American West (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 91-114.

<sup>12</sup> Stanley T. Williams, "Nathaniel Hawthorne," in Literary History of the United States, ed. Robert E. Spiller et al., 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1963), I, 419.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Frost, "The Gift Outright," in The Poetry of Robert Frost (New York: Holt, 1970), pp. 424-425.

<sup>14</sup> William Gilmore Simms, "The Epoch and Events of American History as Suited to the purposes of Art in Fiction," in Views and Reviews in American Literature, History and Fiction, ed. C. Hugh Holman (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1962), pp. 30-127. The quotation from Hawthorne is cited in Randall Stewart, "Hawthorne's Contributions to The Salem Advertiser," American Literature, V (1934), 331.

<sup>15</sup> In The Development of American Romance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), Michael Davitt Bell argues that the romance, as it was practiced in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, was particularly suited to the intellectual tradition of New England.

<sup>16</sup> Simms, Views and Reviews, p. 267. For a full discussion of the relationship of Simms to Cooper, see C. Hugh Holman, "The Influence of Scott and Cooper on Simms," in Roots of Southern Writing, pp. 50-60.

<sup>17</sup> Simms, Views and Reviews, p. 266.

<sup>18</sup> Simms, Views and Reviews, p. 261-62.

<sup>19</sup> William Gilmore Simms, The Yemassee, ed. C. Hugh Holman (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Simms, Views and Reviews, pp. 273-74.

<sup>21</sup> Simms, Views and Reviews, p. 56.

<sup>22</sup> Simms, Views and Reviews, p. 56.

<sup>23</sup> Simms, Views and Reviews, p. 261.

<sup>24</sup> See Alexander Cowie, ed., "The Yemassee Uprising," The Yemassee, by William Gilmore Simms (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1962), pp. xlii-xliv.

<sup>25</sup> Simms, The Yemassee, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Simms, Views and Reviews, p.

27 Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 12.

28 Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, II, pp. 120-21.

29 William Gilmore Simms, The Letters of William Gilmore Simms, Mary C.S. Oliphant, A.T. Odell, and T.C. Eaves, 5 vols. (Columbia, S.C.: The University of South Carolina Press, 1952-1956), I, 319.

30 Allen Tate's Essays of Four Decades (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1968) is perhaps the most important series of American essays examining the influence of Western tradition in American letters. Section IV is of particular interest to the concept of regional letters. See also Collected Poems (1919-1976) (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1977), especially "Retroduction to American History," "The Mediterranean," "Aneas at Washington," and "Aneas at New York."

31 Simms, The Yemassee, pp. 11-13.

32 In Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 319, Northrup Frye notes: It is hardly possible to overestimate the importance for Western literature of the Iliad's demonstration that the fall of an enemy, no less than of a friend or leader, is tragic and not comic."

33 Simms, The Yemassee, p. 368.

34 Simms, The Yemassee, p. 368.

35 Simms, The Yemassee, p. 365.

36 Cooper's archetypal successor becomes the Western "cowboy" hero--the stranger with no known background or past, who rides in from the sunrise and rides out, westward, with the sunset.

37 D.H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (1923, rpt. New York: Viking, 1953), p. 73.

38 For a more theoretical account of the historical imagination see R.G. Collingwood, "The Historical Imagination," in The Idea of History (1946, rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 231-49. See also Harry B. Henderson, Versions of the Past: The Historical Imagination in American Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

<sup>39</sup> C. Vann Woodward, The Burden of Southern History  
(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960).

### CHAPTER III

#### O BRAVE NEW WORLD!: THE RISE OF MIDWESTERN REALISM

The dominant mode of Midwestern writing from the Middle Border of the middle nineteenth-century to the Heartland of the twentieth, is realistic.

"Realism," like "romanticism," "naturalism," or "modernism," is a Gorgon to the literary critic who wishes to define his terms closely. Like the mythical monster who grows two heads for every one which is cut off, the term "realism" sprouts more problems, contradictions, exceptions, influences, relationships, and theories, the more finely honed the definition applied to it is. To discuss realism as critical theory, as Howells, James, and the numerous critics who have succeeded them in this quest have done, is often to discuss the influences of Balzac, Flaubert, Turgenev, and Taine on a generation of well-informed and well-read authors. It is to differentiate between Balzac, Zola, and Huysman; to separate schools, often not readily apparent, into Realistic, Pre-naturalistic, and The Twilight writers. Or it is to weave a critical blanket large enough to cover Mark Twain and Henry James.



But to discuss realism as it applies to Midwestern fiction is to discuss less the continental literary theories and more those tendencies in a literature that arise from the cultural ideas and assumptions of a region. Eggleston and Howe had never extensively read the continental realists when they composed The Hoosier School-Master and The Story of a Country Town. Yet Eggleston and Howe and other writers--Hamlin Garland, Caroline Kirkland, and Joseph Kirkland--are in a general accord as to the form that literature should take. And they are so not because they are theoretical critics, although Garland's 1894 Crumbling Idols gives him some claim to this title, but because their experience of and participation in the Midwest and their desire to write about that region find its expression through realistic techniques.

The reasons for this are twofold. First of all, realism is descriptive: The Midwest, as opposed to New England, the South, and the Middle States, was for many readers of the nineteenth century a "new" place and demanded a description of its "exotics" as much as Virginia and the Carolinas did of William Byrd almost a century and a half earlier. For this reason, Middle Border literature often contains travelogue tendencies--namely the assumption that the people, events, and customs are of interest to the reader in and of

themselves--especially for a predominantly Eastern readership. The verb tense here is important. The antebellum Southern writer is often psychologically using the past tense--describing how Dixie was or comparing today with yesterday. And though the actual tense of almost all fiction is the past tense, the psychological tense of most of these early Midwestern writers is the present--things are the way they are described, not were. These are not historical novels; they are contemporary ones. And in many ways, they share the same psychological verb tense as William Byrd's and Captain John Smith's narratives.

As description, realism treats things that are--actualities. Realism, especially as practiced by Midwestern writers, might be said to be the democratic mode of fiction because of its concern with the depiction of middle and lower class characters and because of its attention to the "unremarkable" day-to-day details of those characters' lives. Underlying this description is the assumption that those events, characters, and objects merit the description. Whether a way of dress, a social custom, or a local dialect, whatever is described in fiction is to some degree, by virtue of that description, elevated. The description of a flower on a dunghill elevates not only the flower but the dunghill as well.

This "democratic" mode--realism--is appropriate for the region the midwestern writer depicts, for the history of the Midwest and its inhabitants is inextricably entangled with populist idealism. At its simplest, populist idealism is the belief in the American Republic as the government of and by the common man.<sup>1</sup> Implicit in the idea of the Midwest is the idea that it is a region which holds the promise of Jacksonian democracy as opposed to the social and financial aristocracies of the South, the industrial Northeast, and New England. This ideal, in part, accounts for the rise in the Midwest of the labor movement, the Free Silver advocacy, the Grange, and other populist movements. At the same time, the ideal also accounts for the nationalistic fervor which could oppose such movements as "Un-American." The Midwest is a region of political contraries under the same held idea. It sent its young men to fight slavery in the South in the Civil War and also to fight the labor movements in Chicago and other cities as state militiamen and National Guardsmen. It is the region which could back Lincoln and Bryan and yet oppose Altgeld's social policies.

This discrepancy between the ideal and the actual, between theory and practice, is often at the core of Midwestern social realism. The result is a literature which at once glorifies the common man as the promise of

America and yet depicts that common man as venal and narrow minded and deploras him for it. Like his Southern counterpart, the Midwestern novelist is caught in an almost schizophrenic vice between the ideal and the actual. But unlike the Southerner, the Midwestern writer can disclaim the past and rage against the present in the hope, perhaps, of reclaiming and shaping the future. In the castigation of the present resides an idealism in the possibilities of the future. In much of Midwestern realism there exists a Gatsby-like hope for and belief in "the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us," a belief that, somehow, "tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther."<sup>2</sup>

This dual tendency is clearly present as early as 1839 in Caroline Kirkland's A New Home--Who'll Follow?. Written under the pseudonym Mrs. Mary Clavers, Kirkland's account of her seven-year residence in backwoods Michigan takes the form of a long letter presumably written for the amusement of a society lady-friend in New York. Though interlaced with romantic episodes and sketches, Kirkland's book is for the most part a detailed account of frontier life in Michigan in the middle 1830's. In her preface, she admits to "glosses, and colorings, and lights, if not shadows, for which the author is alone accountable," but also maintains "I felt somewhat tempted to set forth my little book as being

entirely, what it is very nearly--a veritable history; and unimpeachable transcript of reality; a rough picture, in detached parts, but pentagraphed from life."<sup>3</sup> Eight years later, as literary editor of The United States Magazine and Democratic Review, Ms. Kirkland had become a firm advocate of realism in fiction. "Ninetenths of the magazine stories, so popular among us, have nothing to do with this life . . ." she asserts, "and fiction which has no relation to what has been, or what is to be, must be vapid and valueless."<sup>4</sup> A New Home--Who'll Follow? suggests that this conversion to realism is, in large part, the result of her experiences on the Michigan frontier.

Fittingly for the story of a New York socialite's initiation into frontier life, Kirkland opens her book with an epigram from William Cullen Bryant. In one sense, A New Home is the tale of the de-romanticizing of the West for this Eastern adventurer who sets out on her "Rozinante" to find the frontier of "Hoffman's tour or Captain Hall's 'graphic' delineations." Through the course of the experiences she describes, her romantic notions of the West and the formal New York social proprieties which she so dearly cherishes fall victim to the daily pragmatisms of frontier life. The narrator discovers that on the Middle Border one is dependent on one's neighbors--no matter how crude, by Eastern

standards, those neighbors might be. Like her pretensions, Kirkland's prized and "indispensable" possessions are transformed to utilitarian purposes or thrown away--her china soup tureen becomes a chamber pot, her mahogany bureau finds employment as a corncrib, and her paper slippers completely disintegrate in a Michigan mudhole. After a full recital of the trials of log cabin life--"skillet baths," snakes, and hard tedious work--the narrator amusedly reflects that, before coming West, she had "dwelt with delight on Chateaubriand's Atala where no such inconvenience is once hinted at, and my floating visions of a home in the woods were full of important omissions, and always in a Floridian climate, where fruits serve for vivers."<sup>5</sup>

Kirkland learns to love the West, though more for what it can be than for what it is:

After allowing due weight to the many disadvantages and trials of a new country life, it would scarce be fair to pass without notice the compensating power of a feeling inherent as I believe, in our universal nature, which rejoices in that freedom from the restraints of pride and ceremony which is found only in a new country. To borrow from a brilliant writer of our own, "I think we have an instinct, dulled by civilization, which is like a caged eaglet's, or the antelope's that is reared in the arab's tent; an instinct of nature that scorns boundary and chain. . . ." This "Instinct", so beautifully noticed by Willis, is what I would point to as the compensating power of the wilderness. Those who are "to the manor born" feel this most sensibly, and pity with all their simple hearts the walled-up denizens of the city.

And the transplanted ones--those who have been used to no forests but "forests of chimneys," though "the parted bosom clings to wonted home," soon learn to think nature no step-mother, and to discover many redeeming points even in the half-wild state at first so uncongenial.<sup>6</sup>

This love is given with full attention to the realists of the harsh life in the West, a life, as Kirkland reiterates throughout A New Home, very different from the romantic descriptions of Chateaubriand, Cooper, Captain Hall, and Irving. Kirkland's praise of Michigan is also a manifesto on the necessity of realism to describe what is, at the core, the experience of the West. In her descriptions of life on the Middle Border she is also calling for a new form of writing as well, in much the same way that Mark Twain will in Life on the Mississippi. Mark Twain's cub pilot goes from the romance of riverboating to the stronger and more vibrant actuality of running the Mississippi. It is an experienced pilot, not a daydreaming boy, and a literary realist, who writes:

Now when I had mastered the language of this water and had come to know every trifling feature that bordered the great river as familiarly as I knew the letters of the alphabet, I had made a valuable acquisition. But I had lost something. I had lost something that could never be restored to me as long as I lived. All the grace and the beauty, the poetry had gone out of the majestic river! . . .

No, the romance and the beauty were all gone from the river. All the value any

feature of it had for me now was the amount of usefulness it could furnish toward compassing the safe piloting of a steamboat. Since those days, I have pitied doctors from my heart. What does the lovely flush in a beauty's cheek mean to a doctor but a "break" that ripples above some deadly disease? Are not all her visible charms sown thick with what [are] to him the signs and symbols of decay? Does he ever see her beauty at all, or doesn't he simply view her professionally, and comment upon her unwholesome condition all to himself? And doesn't he sometimes wonder whether he has gained<sup>7</sup> most or lost most by learning his trade?

In her subsequent two-volume Forest Life (1842), Kirkland has more praise for the West, this time in direct contrast with the East.

The contrast can be imagined only by those who have tried both . . . the difference may be compared to that which marks the course of the Niagara--in one place rapids and cataracts agitating the mighty flood till the air is filled with a brilliant spray, and earth trembles to the deep-voiced roar of the waters; and again, after only a single bend in the river, a glassy, waveless expanse, whose onward motion is scarcely perceptible. Over the one may now and then be discerned a glorious rainbow, but the other reflects always the green and peaceful shores, and the bright and steady lamps of heaven. Yet I suppose one must be like the fish, gold-blooded, to prefer the still water.<sup>8</sup>

But such epiphanic moments are rare in A New Home; Kirkland often has more invective than praise for the dwellers of her "Niagara." Like Howe, Garland, Lewis, Anderson, and others of the Midwestern writers who follow her, Kirkland sees in the Middle West the



potential for a fulfillment of the democratic ideal, and, having glimpsed the potential, she is all the more critical of the actuality she encounters. Though certainly no early populist, for to ignore Kirkland's patrician sympathies would be to distort greatly and to weaken the tension in her work, she envisions a republic of first-rate men and women. Yet with only a few notable exceptions, A New Home is a gallery of sketches of second-, third- and even lower-rate individuals who, taken together, constitute a mobocracy of ignorance and venality--a Jacksonian nightmare.<sup>9</sup>

A modern reader may find more amusement and less vexation than Kirkland does in her accounts of the unwillingness of her local Michiganders to take positions as servants "with an acknowledgement of inferior station," but may sympathize with Kirkland's assertion:

If the best man now living should honor my humble roof with his presence--if he should happen to have an unfortunate penchant for eating out of the dishes, picking his teeth with his fork, or using the fireplace for a pocket handkerchief, I would prefer he should take his dinner solus or with those who did as he did.<sup>10</sup>

But while dress, table manners, social forms, and habits are amusing topics for Kirkland's Eastern audience, the author of A New Home sees these things as small manifestations of a greater problem--namely the employment of the democratic ideal of "equality" as

justification for ignorance and parochialism. Her concern is common to much of Midwestern literature--the future of the American dream is in danger from a perversion of the very ideals which that dream embodies.

The better classes of English settlers seem to have left their own country with high-wrought notions of the unbounded freedom to be enjoyed in this; and it is with feelings of angry surprise that they learn after a short residence here, that this very universal freedom abridges their own liberty to do as they please in their individual capacity; that the absolute democracy which prevails in country places, imposes as heavy restraints upon one's free-will in some particulars, as do the over-bearing pride and haughty distinctions of the old world in others; and after one has changed one's whole plan of life, and crossed the wide ocean to find Utopia, the waking to reality is sometimes attended with feelings of no slight bitterness. (Emphasis mine).<sup>11</sup>

Here again is the juxtaposition between the ideal and the reality to be found on the Middle Border. But after reading A New Home, one is perhaps justified in wondering if Kirkland is not speaking of her own experience as well as that of the English settlers in the region. If "the better classes of Eastern settlers" is substituted for "the better class of English settlers," "cosmopolitan society" is substituted for "old world," and "the Alleghenies" is substituted for "the wide ocean," we have in summary the story of the experience of the narrator of Kirkland's book.

Throughout her narrative, Kirkland exposes what she deems to be the tyranny of the "Republican spirit" that manifests itself in both small and large ways as a perversion of the high ideals to which it lays claim. The ideal of a community of free men has degenerated into a practice of enforced "borrowing" which obligates Kirkland's narrator to loan anything and everything to any neighbor who demands it--staples, horses, razors, linens, china, garden plots. The request is even made for the narrator to loan her baby--a request which she refuses. Even the loftiest sentiments of the American ideal are cheapened by the hard usage of the frontier Republican. Perhaps the strongest example of this is found in Kirkland's sketch of the politician, Mr. Jenkins, "a muscular Rob-Roy," whose claims to integrity reside in his ability to intimidate any would-be detractor.

[Mr. Jenkins] had made up his mind to serve his country, and he was all this time convincing his fellow citizens of the disinterested purity of his sentiments.

"Patriotism," he would say, "patriotism is the thing! any man that's too proud to serve his country aint fit to live. Some thinks so much o' themselves, that if they cant have jist what they think they're fit for, they won't take nothing; but for my part, I call myself an American citizen; and any office that's in the gift o' the people will suit me. I'm up to any thing. And as there aint no other man about here,--no suitable man, I mean--that's got a horse, why I'd be willing to be constable, if the people's a mind to, though it would be a dead loss to me in my

business, to be sure; but I could do any thing for my country. Hurra for patriotism! them's my sentiments."<sup>12</sup>

Court proceedings, town meetings, and elections are most often used to private advantage. "No matter at what distance these important affairs are transacted, so fair an excuse for a ploy can never pass unimproved; and the virtuous indignation which is called forth by any attempt at dissuading one of the sovereigns from exercising 'the noblest privilege of a freeman,' to forward your business and his own, is most amusingly provoking."<sup>13</sup> Throughout A New Home, Kirkland's narrator bridles at this rule of ignorance, and while she may be able to laugh at her own elitism, her amusement in the reverse snobbism of her Michigan neighbors is forced. She warns her Eastern reader who may be setting out to find the American ideal in the Middle Border:

He will find he has no humble neighbors. He will very soon discover, that in his new sphere, no act of kindness, no offer of aid, will be considered as anything short of insult, if the least suspicion of condescension peep out. Equality, perfect and practical, is the sine qua non; and any appearance of a desire to avoid this rather trying fraternization is invariably met by a fierce and indignant resistance. The spirit in which was conceived the motto of the French revolution, "La fraternite ou la mort," exists in full force<sup>14</sup> among us, though modified as to the results.

Throughout her book, Kirkland makes it clear, however, that the East is not necessarily preferable to the West. Occasionally, she will soften statements such as those above with remarks such as "all of this forms part of the schooling which I propose for my spoiled child of refined civilization."<sup>15</sup> Though she often poses a bit as a cultural missionary among heathens, Kirkland's narrator also comes to consider herself a "Michigander". And it is this adoption of the frontier as her home that leads to her indignation. Though Caroline Kirkland did return to New York from the frontier, she did so after the publication of A New Home. The book itself is not written at a distance.

Especially for A New Home--Who'll Follow?, Caroline Kirkland deserves her place in Midwestern and national letters. She is not only a pioneer of the Middle Border but also a pioneer of what is to become the dominant mode of fiction in the first half of the twentieth-century. It is often difficult in reading A New Home to remember that Kirkland is a contemporary of Cooper, Simms, Irving, Emerson, and Hawthorne. A New Home is published only four years after The Yemassee, three years after Emerson's Nature, two years after Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales, in the same year as Longfellow's Hyperion, and precedes The Pathfinder, The Deerslayer, and The Scarlet Letter. It is arguable

whether Kirkland is a fiction writer, though parts of A New Home are undisputably fictional, but there can be little argument about Kirkland's position as a realist. One needs only to compare her frontier with Irving's romantic West in A Tour of the Prairies to see her difference in attitude toward the subject. "I have never seen a cougar," Kirkland confesses on the first page of her book, "--nor been bitten by a rattlesnake."<sup>16</sup> Such events are better left to other kinds of tales; Kirkland found the West in its actuality fresh enough to enrapture the imagination.

A comparison of Kirkland's A New Home--Who'll Follow? with Southerner John Pendleton Kennedy's Swallow Barn, or a Sojourn in the Old Dominion (1832) is useful in showing how differences in regional perspectives affect the form of the narrative. At first glance, the two works seem remarkably similar.<sup>17</sup> Kennedy's Mark Littleton is also a New Yorker, like Kirkland's narrator, and is visiting a Virginia plantation and writing his adventures in a long epistle to a friend in New York. Both Kirkland and Kennedy in their prefaces disclaim any novelistic ambitions for their work. Kirkland and Kennedy, in the structuring of their works, evidence certain debts to previous narratives and in particular to works of Irving--A Tour of the Prairies and Bracebridge Hall respectively.<sup>18</sup> And most significantly,

both writers lay great emphasis on the accuracy and truthfulness of their accounts.<sup>19</sup>

In his preface to the 1832 edition, Kennedy admits "I had great difficulty to prevent myself from writing a novel," but maintains "The country and the people are at least truly described."<sup>20</sup> In his preface to the 1853 edition, entitled "A Word in Advance, from the Author to the Reader," Kennedy asserts "Swallow Barn [sic] exhibits a picture of country life in Virginia as it existed in the first quarter of the present century."<sup>21</sup> He continues:

Presenting, as I make bold to say, a faithful picture of the people, the modes of life, and the scenery of a region full of attraction, and exhibiting the lights and shades of its society with the truthfulness of a painter who has studied his subject on the spot, [these sketches] may reasonably claim their accuracy of delineation to be set off as an extenuation for any want of skill or defect of finish which a fair criticism may charge against the artist.<sup>22</sup>

Yet, there is little in Swallow Barn to justify Kennedy's claim for realism. Although through his use of a "Yankee" narrator Kennedy must have hoped to achieve a semblance of objective reporting, as well as to assure the warm reception of an Eastern audience, the world of Swallow Barn differs very little from the plantation life so romantically and nostalgically portrayed later by Thomas Nelson Page in his post-bellum

fiction. Kennedy's Virginia is populated with honest rustics, knightly gentlemen, courtly ladies, and affectionate, as well as comic, slaves. The book is predominantly episodic and tied together loosely by a comic plot involving a dispute between two plantations, Swallow Barn and the Brakes, over a worthless piece of land. Like the feuds of two great families in romantic fiction, the dispute will be brought to an end by the marriage of offspring of each plantation. Unlike Kirkland's use of humor, Kennedy's is not instructive but is rather directed at endearing rather than exposing the Virginians. The politeness of the feud, a fist fight that vanquishes the village bully (entitled "A Joust at Utterance"), an heroic hunt for a lady's lost hawk ("Knight Errantry")--all serve gently and humorously to erect rather than to demolish an air of courtliness and chivalry at Kennedy's Virginia plantation.

In spite of the discussion of farming, economics, and politics which are interspersed throughout the novel, Swallow Barn is a romantic picture of the Old Dominion. Noticeably missing in Kennedy's "true portrait" are lower class whites and small planters.<sup>23</sup> There is little ignorance among Kennedy's Southerners, no real poverty, and no disease. But of Kennedy's inclusions, the most romantic portrayal is of slavery.



It is only in the final chapters of the book that Kennedy addresses himself to this issue. In "The Quarters," Mark Littleton, Kennedy's Northern narrator, is taken for a tour of the slave cabins. Littleton notes:

The air of contentment and good humor and kind family attachment, which was apparent throughout this little community, and the familiar relations existing between them and the proprietor struck me very pleasantly. I came here a stranger, in great degree, to the negro character, knowing but little of the domestic history of these people, their duties, habits or temper, and somewhat disposed, indeed from prepossession, to look upon them as severely dealt with, and expecting to have my sympathies excited towards them as objects of commiseration. I have had, therefore, rather a special interest in observing them. The contrast between my preconceptions of their condition and the reality which I have witnessed, has brought me the most agreeable surprise. I will not say that, in a high state of cultivation and of such self-dependence as they might possibly attain in a separate national existence, they might not become a more respectable people; but I am quite sure they could never become a happier people than I find them here.<sup>24</sup>

Meriweather, the proprietor of Swallow Barn, sees slavery as a necessary evil in the ultimate civilization of the black race, and deplores "the separation of man and wife" and advocates laws "to forbid the separation under any contingency, except of crime."<sup>25</sup> Meriweather, who is, for the novel, representative of the Southern whites' attitudes toward the blacks, wishes to set up a system by which "the most deserving of slaves" should

gain their own tracts of land to farm and would eventually "gain civil and criminal judicial authority" over the other Negroes. Meriweather's problem, however, is that the negroes of Swallow Barn, like Old Jupiter, the child-like patriarch of the Quarters, have no desire for any such elevation of responsibility. In this, Littleton concurs: "'I suspect,' said I, 'Jupiter considers that his dignity is not to be enhanced by any enlargement of privilege, as long as he is allowed to walk about in his military hat as King of the Quarter.'"<sup>26</sup> Jupiter, in Kennedy's account, is every bit as romantic a character as Hector, Gabriel Harrison's servant in Simms' The Yemassee, who staunchly refuses his freedom when it is offered to him by his master.

Although Old Lucy, an old slave woman who mourns the death of her estranged and criminal son as much as Molly Beauchamp of Faulkner's story, "Go Down Moses!," is depicted as a figure of great pathos and dignity, Kennedy's enobling of her character does not call into question the institution of slavery. For the most part, Kennedy's Negro is a romantic stereotype:

At present, I have said, he is parasitical. He grows upward only as the vine to which nature has supplied the sturdy tree as a support. He is extravagantly imitative. The older negroes here have--with some spice of comic mixture in it--that formal, grave and ostentatious style of manners, which belonged to the gentlemen of former days; they are profuse of bows and compliments, and very

aristocratic in their way. The younger ones are equally to be remarked for aping the style of the present time, and especially for such tags of dandyism in dress as come within their reach. Their fondness for music and dancing is a predominant passion. I have never met a negro man--unless he is quite old--that he is not whistling; and the women sing from morning till night. And as to dancing, the hardest day's work does not restrain their desire to indulge in such pastime. . . . They are great sportsmen too. They angle and haul the seine, and hunt and tend their traps, with a zest that never grows weary. Their gayety of heart is constitutional and perennial, and when they are together they are as voluble and noisy as so many blackbirds. In short, I think them the most good-natured, careless, light-hearted, and happily constructed human beings I have ever seen.<sup>27</sup>

Kennedy's claim that his idyllic pastoral is a "true portrait" of Southern life must be considered in the context of Swallow Barn's first publication in 1832 and also of its re-issue in 1853. Although the novel was published in the same year as South Carolina's Nullification Act, no tensions exist between Kennedy's Southerners and their Yankee guest. Though they share some political differences, they find themselves generally in accord with each other. It is Kennedy's implicit warning that this accord must be preserved by allowing the South to solve her own problems. When Meriweather addresses the Northern narrator, Kennedy is actually addressing his Northern audience:

"One thing I desire you specially to note: the question of emancipation is exclusively our own, and every intermeddling with it from

abroad will but mar its chance of success. . . . We think, and, indeed we know, that we alone are able to deal properly with the subject; all others are misled by the feeling which the natural sentiment against slavery, in the abstract, excites. They act under imperfect knowledge and impulsive prejudices which are totally incompatible with wise action on the subject. We, on the contrary, have every motive to calm and prudent counsel. Our lives, fortunes, families--our commonwealth itself, are put at the hazard of this resolve.<sup>28</sup>

It must be noted as well that Kennedy's novel was published a year after Nat Turner's slave rebellion which caused widespread terror among many Southern whites and resulted in brutal reprisals against blacks throughout the South, but only rarely do the actual events of Kennedy's day intrude in the world of Swallow Barn. Though the events of the novel are set in 1829, Kennedy's idyllic 1829 in Swallow Barn is almost as far removed from his own present as Simms' Indian uprising in The Yemassee is from that novel's publication in 1835. The use of the romantic serves Kennedy as it serves Simms; it recreates a past by which the present is measured as lacking.

The revisions of Swallow Barn for the 1853 republication are mainly stylistic ones.<sup>29</sup> Like Simms, Kennedy opposed the Nullification Doctrine, but unlike Simms, Kennedy never contracted secessionist fever; he often resided in Philadelphia and was a staunch Unionist. Kennedy and Simms, however, shared the same feeling of

urgency for the right of the South to determine its own political destiny. In a March, 1851 letter to Simms, Kennedy writes:

The mawkish sentimentality which has been so busy of late in inventing sympathy for the pretended oppression of the negroes, it strikes me may render a new edition of Swallow Barn [sic], which is rather a good natured, and I am sure a true picture of the amiable and happy relations they hold to southern [sic] society--opportune at this moment, and so far as it may be well received an antidote to the abolition mischief.<sup>30</sup>

Kennedy's message to Simms is clear; the past, the romantic past of Swallow Barn, is perhaps a tonic for the ills of the present. What was true in 1832, was true for 1853, and also again on the novel's republication in 1860 as the country drew closer to the edge of national calamity, and again for the novel's reissue in 1865 following the defeat of the South and the beginning of Reconstruction.

It would be wrong to consider Kennedy merely as a propagandist for the South, though clearly there are propagandistic views in Swallow Barn, as wrong as it would be to view Kirkland as an Eastern snob reacting to the coarseness of the dwellers of the Middle Border frontier--although evidences of such snobbishness may be found throughout A New Home. Rather, as regional writers, both may be taken at their word that they have presented a "true picture" of the regions they depict.

For both writers, the true region is not necessarily contemporary with them. For Kirkland, the true Middle West is found in the promise of the future which the present must live up to and evolve into. For Kennedy, the true South is the romantic South--the idealized and harmonious past which the present must strive to recapture. Whether either region actually has ever existed is finally irrelevant; both regions have existed and continue to exist in the regional consciousness that shapes both the form of American fiction and American literature in general.

Caroline Kirkland's portrayal of the Middle West in A New Home is followed by several decades of conventional love stories played out against a Middle Border background. These stories, the best of which are exemplified in the novels of two sisters, Metta V. Victor and Francis Fuller Barritt, are sentimental love plots in which the genteel Eastern protagonists serve as cultural ambassadors to the rude West.<sup>31</sup> As Henry Nash Smith points out, at the heart of such novels is "the theory of social stages which places the West below the East in a sequence to which both belong. The West has no meaning of itself because the only value recognized by the theory of civilization is the refinement which is believed to increase steadily as one moves from primitive simplicity and coarseness to the complexity and

polish of urban life."<sup>32</sup> Certainly this social theory, as Smith articulates it, is present in Kirkland's work as is the conventional and unconvincing love story that comprises most of the final chapters of A New Home, but implicit in Kirkland's work and missing in these other novels is a sense of the Middle West as possessing its own intrinsic values and possibilities (however unrealized they may be) which are independent of the East.

It was, in part, a reaction to this social theory that led Edward Eggleston to compose The Hoosier School-Master (1871).<sup>33</sup> Eggleston's novel marks the beginning of a school of late nineteenth-century Midwestern writers, including E.W. Howe, Joseph Kirkland, and Hamlin Garland, who were committed to the idea of the Midwest as a subject for fiction and committed to realism as a literary method. In his Preface to the 1871 edition of The Hoosier School-Master, Eggleston remarks:

It used to be a matter of no little jealousy with us, I remember, that the manners, customs, thoughts, and feelings of New England country people filled so large a place in books, while our life, not less interesting, not less romantic, and certainly not less filled with humorous and grotesque material, had no place in literature. It was<sup>34</sup> as though we were shut out of good society.

It is difficult to judge The Hoosier School-Master as a great novel or as one that fully lives up to the

intentions of its author. Its central character, schoolmaster Ralph Hartsook, is almost a character out of the New England tradition that Eggleston argues against in his Preface.<sup>35</sup> The mystery-love plot of the novel borders on the preposterous. Yet in spite of these basic flaws, Eggleston's novel contains ideas important to the development of Midwestern literature and shows the first important attempt to use the Midwest as a subject for a sustained narrative.

In his 1871 Preface, Eggleston asserts "Our Western writers did not dare speak of the West otherwise than as the unreal world to which Cooper's lively imagination had given birth."<sup>36</sup> Whatever its demerits of central character and plot, The Hoosier School-Master attempts to describe the life particular to Eggleston's Indiana region--from climate to rural life to social customs, most notably the "spelling school." Most important in the novel is Eggleston's consistent attempt to reproduce Hoosier dialect. Acknowledging Lowell's The Bigelow Papers as his model, Eggleston continues, "I may claim for this book the distinction, such as it is, of being the first of the dialect stories that depict a life quite beyond New England influence."<sup>37</sup> Although at least one critic has taken exception to the author's claim for accuracy in his depiction of Hoosier speech, Eggleston's use of dialect is not only a curiosity of



the novel, but of fundamental importance to it.<sup>38</sup> Implicit in Eggleston's claim for the novel and throughout the novel itself is the idea that dialect is not merely a different way of expression, but rather the expression of a difference. For example, when Eggleston's local hero, Bud Means, reinterprets Protestant church liturgy into his creed of the church of "best licks", he has not only vernacularized the religious principles but has also recreated them meaningfully for his region.<sup>39</sup>

Important also is Bud Means' status as a hero in the novel. He is farm bred and has none of the pretensions to refinement and ancestry so common in the earlier Midwestern love stories. This use of the regional character as hero, even though he is superceded in heroism by Ralph Hartsook, is important to Eggleston's establishment of a social theory opposed to the New England notion of social classes. Bud exemplifies a social theory of "character" as opposed to social class--a theme which runs throughout Midwestern fiction.

Eggleston, like Simms and like Hamlin Garland, was a strong proponent of regional literature. In his preface to the 1891 "Library Edition" of The Hoosier School-Master, he proclaims:

The taking up of life in this regional way has made our literature really national by the only process possible. The Federal nation has

at length manifested a consciousness of the continental diversity of its forms of life. The "Great American novel," for which prophetic critics yearned so fondly twenty years ago, is appearing in sections.<sup>40</sup>

In such a statement, Eggleston is calling attention to the differences in his region from the rest of the nation and from other regions as well. In doing so, he is one of the first Midwestern writers to voice the claim that the Midwestern character is not merely an Eastern character in an exotic setting but rather is created by and possessor of an indigenous mind and culture.

Eggleston's claims to realism are based not only on his painstaking attention to dialect and his portrayal of local customs and lifestyles, but also in his aversion to a social theory based on social class. His own labeling of his work as "provincial realism" is another way of affirming the integrity of the "provincial" as defined by Eastern standards. For all of the sentimentality of his story, Eggleston's Indiana is not a place of honest rustics in pure pastoral happiness. For every Bud, there is a bully. Courts, political offices, and public institutions such as the Poor-House and the Orphanage are susceptible to corruption by dishonest and venal individuals. The present of The Hoosier School-Master is not perfect or nearly so; the American dream has not been realized in Flat Creek, Indiana. But for

Eggleston, through the "character" of men like Bud Means, it may yet be.<sup>41</sup>

In E.W. Howes' The Story of a Country Town (1883) and Joseph Kirkland's Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County (1887), the optimism for the future so prevalent at the ending of The Hoosier School-Master has all but vanished. In Howe's novel is the first real expression of the bleakness and inherent desperation of small town and farm life on the Middle Border that were to be further developed by Hamlin Garland in Main-Traveled Roads, continued by Sherwood Anderson in Winesburg, Ohio, and expressed at its blackest by Ole Rølvaag in Giants in the Earth. Although the title of Howe's novel suggests otherwise, the first third of The Story of a Country Town takes place in the farming district and many of the subsequent events of the novel also take place outside of the town. There is, however, no real town-country division in Howe's attitude toward the region; Howe's town, Twin Mounds, is only an intensification of the barrenness of his country settlement, Fairview.

Fairview is no romantic pastoral setting as Howe's somewhat neurotic narrator, Ned Westlock, makes clear in the opening chapter of the novel. In Ned's first words are the romantic aspirations of the Middle Border settlers: "Ours was the prairie district out West, where

we had gone to grow up with the country."<sup>42</sup> The rest of the story is the comparison of the reality of Middle Border life with all the expectations that such a statement would imply. By the end of the novel that dream of the West has become a nightmare. Although Ned admits that "everyone who came there was favorably impressed with the fertility of the soil," he adds that Fairview was not the fulfillment of the promise of the Western adventure, and concludes, "When anyone stopped in our neighborhood, he was too poor and tired to follow the others [Westward settlers]."<sup>43</sup> Aside from the fertile soil, there is little else inviting in Westlock's description of Fairview:

On the highest and bleakest point in the country where the winds were plenty in the winter because they were not needed, and scarce in the summer for an opposite reason, the meeting-house was built, in a corner of my father's field. This was called Fairview and so the neighborhood was known. There was a graveyard around it, and cornfields next to that, but not a tree or shrub attempted its ornament, and as the building stood on the main road where the movers' wagons passes, I thought that, next to their ambition to get away from the country which had been left by those in Fairview, the movers were anxious to get away from Fairview church, and avoid the possibility of being buried in its ugly shadow, for they always seemed to drive faster after passing it.<sup>44</sup>

In the conclusion of this chapter, Westlock hints that the barrenness of Fairview had taken its psychological as well as physical toll on its residents and on himself

in particular. Reflecting on his childhood years in the farming settlement, he concludes: "When I think of the years I lived in Fairview, I imagine that the sun was never bright there (although I am certain that it was), and I cannot relieve my mind of the impression that the cold, clinging shadow of the church has spread decay during my long absence and enveloped all the houses where people lived."<sup>45</sup>

In Howe's description of rural life is the recurrent theme of a dusty road, a theme which was to serve Garland as metaphor in Main-Traveled Roads, of back breaking labor on an unforgiving land, and of the almost bestial obstinacy of the farmer trying to wring a small subsistence out of his continual labor. Ned's description of Fairview makes the settlement appear to be a secular manifestation of the Hell which his father, the Reverend John Westlock, constantly put before the eyes of his congregation at Fairview. Ned's father's religion and the land are paralleled throughout the country episodes of the novel. Ned summarizes his settlement's feelings about religion by stating that "Religion was a misery to be endured on earth that a reward might be enjoyed after death."<sup>46</sup> Fairview and Twin Mounds comprise the location of that miserable endurance.

If the Fairview district is Hell, then Twin Mounds is its ninth circle. In his description of the town's

citizens, Howe demolishes the idea of the small town citizen as the strong backbone of the nation. Westlock remarks:

The only resident of Twin Mounds who ever distinguished himself ran away with the circus and never came back, for although he was never heard of it was generally believed that he must have become famous in some way to induce him to forgo the pleasure of returning home in good clothes, and swaggering up and down the street to allow people to shake his hand.<sup>47</sup>

Through Ned's portraits of the townspeople, Howe paints a damning portrait of the narrowness, maliciousness, and hypocrisy of Twin Mounds' citizens.

I never formed a good opinion of a man there that I was not finally told something to his discredit by another citizen, causing me to regard him with great suspicion, and if I said a good word for any of them, it was proved beyond question immediately that he was a very unscrupulous, a very ridiculous, a very weak, and a very worthless man.<sup>48</sup>

As I grew older, and began to notice more, I thought that every man in Twin Mounds had reason to feel humiliated that he had not accomplished more, but most of them were as conceited as though there was nothing left in the world worthy of their attention. Their small business affairs, their quarrels over the Bible, and an occasional term in the town council, or a mention for the legislature or a county office, satisfied them, and they were as content<sup>49</sup> as men who really amounted to something.

The plot of The Story of a Country Town provides a thorough debunking of the romantic notions of the Heartland. Ned's father leaves the ministry to become a

newspaper owner and then runs off with a married woman. "Discontent is my disease," he writes in an explanatory note to Ned. Ned's mother is slowly worn down by her husband's brooding, by the harshness of her life, and then by her husband's elopement and her solitude; she dies with "a look of inexpressible grief on her face." Jo Erring, Ned's young uncle and childhood friend, through his cheerful nature and hard work becomes a successful tradesman and marries his refined sweetheart, Mateel, after a story-book romance; but the region takes its toll on even so robust a figure as Erring. He becomes moody, then pathologically jealous of his wife, rejects her, and when she divorces him and becomes engaged again, he murders her fiance. He ends by committing suicide in the Twin Mounds jail. Mateel dies from shock and illness. All the bright dreams of adolescence are destroyed by the reality of the present. Even the populist revolt of the farmer comes under Howe's attack in the character of Biggs, the organizer of the farmers' collectives who is himself inept in running his own farm and who passes off pathetic homilies as wisdom.

Ned does marry Agnes, the school-mistress, and tell us at the end of the novel that he is "worth considerable money." In the honest characters of the Meeks and Big Adam, there is a glimmer of hope in Howe's otherwise

desperate picture of the Midwestern small town, but even that hope is dim. At the end of the novel, Ned and Agnes, though they have an income which does not require them to work, still reside in Twin Mounds, trapped in its narrowness. The novel closes with the note on which it began--the tolling of the Fairview church bell, in requiem for the dead, over the desolate and unforgiving landscape.

Howe's sympathetic and realistic portrayal of the small town met with approval from other American realists. Mark Twain remarked in a letter to Howe, "Your pictures of that arid village life, and the insides and outsides of its people are vivid, and what is more true; I know, for I have seen it all, lived it all."<sup>50</sup>

William Dean Howells wrote to Howe, "I have lived in your Country Town, and I know it is every word true."<sup>51</sup> Hamlin Garland was to acknowledge Howe as influential in his own decision to become a writer.

Though others, like Joseph Kirkland, objected to what they saw as melodrama in Howe's novel, and though any modern reader will be struck by the chain of unlikely coincidences that lead to the improbable conclusion that Damon Barker is Agnes' long lost father, The Story of a Country Town is an uneven but important early realistic American novel. It points to and influences a trend in Midwestern literature that will



become increasingly prevalent in the twentieth century--the idea of the Midwest as the land of a promise lost.

Joseph Kirkland's Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County (1887) contains as dark a picture of Midwestern life as The Story of a Country Town, but this darkness is somewhat mitigated by Kirkland's use of humor and the tall tale in much the same way that Mark Twain uses humor as a device in "The Man Who Corrupted Hadleyburg." Kirkland, like his mother, Caroline Kirkland, shatters the notion of romantic primitivism that had been so often associated with the settlement of the Middle West. Like Eggleston's The Hoosier School-Master, Zury is notable for Kirkland's fidelity in his depiction of the dialect of the region which he describes, and much of the tall tale humor which runs throughout the novel is a result of this vernacular.

But unlike Eggleston's Hoosiers, Kirkland's Zury Prouder is an ambivalent character. Zury's most interesting feature is his native slyness and intelligence with which he elevates himself from a poor settler's son to be the richest and "meanest" (stingiest) man in Spring County, Illinois, and eventually to election to the legislature. At first, Zury seems to have much more in common with "flush times" humorist Johnson Jones Hooper's Simon Suggs,

whose motto is "it is good to be shifty in a new country," than with Eggleston's good-hearted Bud Means. But unlike Hooper's scalawag, and like Bud Means, Zury's most redeeming quality is his honesty. But, as Kirkland's character shows, honesty is not necessarily paired with generosity or compassion. As one Spring County resident remarks of Zury:

Gimme a man as sez right aout 'look aout fer yerself,' 'n' I kin git along with him. It's these h'yer sneakin' fellers th't's one thing afore yer face 'n' another behind yer back th't I can't abide. Take ye by th' beard with one hand 'n' smite ye under the fifth rib with t'other! He [Zury] pays his way 'n' dooz 's he 'grees every time. . . . He knows haow t' trade, 'n' ef yew don't he don't want ye t' trade with him, that's all; ner t' grumble if ye git hold o' the hot eend o' th' poker arter he's give ye fair notice. Better be<sup>52</sup> shaved with a sharp razor than a dull one.

Zury, whose name is short of "Usury," sees his own honesty mainly in economic terms:

"Honest? Me? Wal, I guess so. Fustly, I could n't be noth'n' else, nohaow; seckondly, I kin 'fford t' be, seeing' 's haow it takes a full bag t' stand alone; thirdly, I can't 'fford t' be noth'n' else, coz honesty's th' best policy."<sup>53</sup>

Zury's dictum that "honesty pays" is crucial to the understanding of his character. The reader is often left to wonder what Zury's character might be like if honest did not literally pay. Kirkland's farmer has no time to discourse eloquently on the virtues of country

life or the feeling of freedom that comes from open spaces. Zury is a pragmatic farmer, a materialist; he works the land to make money. Money, he claims, is "suth'n' th't's got t' be dug outer the graoun' 'n' then traded off fer suth'n' th't's growed a-top o' graoun' . . . suth'n'r other th't takes labor."<sup>54</sup>

Money is the motivation behind most of Zury's action in the novel. He marries twice to increase his wealth and because he needs another hard worker. What he learns from suffering under the mortgage system is to "have holt of the right end o' the poker" and he vows that if he ever gets a mortgage on someone "It'll sizzle his hands, tew, afore I'll ever let up on him."<sup>55</sup> As a poor farmer, he can declare, like Caroline Kirkland's Michiganders, "Borryin' 's a needcessity, 'n' payin' 's a luxury," but when he becomes wealthier, he becomes the advocate of swift repayment.<sup>56</sup> He even reclaims a puppy from a child who has defaulted on a payment. "Business is Business!" is his motto.

Kirkland's descriptions of the Prouder family's settlement in Spring County is perhaps the best portrait of the realities of farm life in nineteenth-century Midwestern fiction. The oppressiveness of the mortgage system, the death of Zury's sister from the coldness of winter and the harshness of farm work, Mrs. Prouder's giving her wedding ring to the local doctor as payment

for a bill--all serve as clues to Zury's character. Kirkland's detailed descriptions of land clearing, "niggering" logs, raising hogs, "girdling" trees, and other day-to-day processes of farm life serve to create a picture harshly different from the idealized notions of settler life found in many of the earlier novels about the Midwest.<sup>57</sup>

Zury, for all his "meanness," emerges in the novel as a product of his region, a hero if only because of his ability to survive his early years with determination and a native good humor. He is the realist's Horatio Alger hero, who pulls himself up through "pluck," but with little reliance on "luck." He gets ahead because he means to, and never forgets what he is about.

Zury is an uneven novel. Kirkland is at his best in the early chapters in which he describes the Proudler family's battle with the land and Zury's ultimate success as a farmer. The love plot between Zury and Anne Sparrow (later Anne McVey), a New England school mistress who has come to Spring County for adventure, has been called by Henry Nash Smith "one of the strangest matings in all literature."<sup>58</sup> In spite of Zury's unconvincing transformation into generosity of character and spirit brought about by Anne's influence upon him, the school-mistress serves a necessary function in the

novel. She is the outsider whose romantic notions are tempered by her experience in the West. Her education in the novel is much the same education about Midwestern life which Kirkland wished to bring to his reader.<sup>59</sup>

Through Anne, we see the romantic notion meet the reality of farm life. The odor of the horse barn vanquishes the New Englander's idyllic notion of the "natural" life. Where Anne sees an acre of beautiful forest, Zury sees firewood and the back breaking labor of clearing the ground for crops. Anne finds money of little importance until her money is destroyed in a fire and she must seek financial help from Zury.

But Anne is useful to Kirkland in other ways than just as a contrast to Zury. As Anthony Hilfer has pointed out, Anne's point of view aids Kirkland in "polemicizing against the ugliness of the farm and the village."<sup>60</sup> Kirkland's frequent switching of the novel's focus from Zury to Anne allows him to comment on aspects of Midwestern life which would escape Zury's notice. For example, in a chapter that opens with Anne's awaking on her first morning in Spring County, Kirkland gives the following description:

All night the world is a lovely, half-veiled Danae; with the break of day she becomes a squalid, unkempt, disorderly invalid. A blue, unwholesome-looking haze spreads over every flat space, and the rays of the dawn silver its surface with a pale, sickly light. The day which is refreshing at night-fall is dank

at daybreak. Ague, like the ghost of a giant snake, crawls visible over the land: men shudder at the sight, and their flesh creeps at its very hideousness.<sup>61</sup>

Through Anne's observations, Kirkland makes clear that he is describing, but not necessarily praising, as Eggleston did, the rural life in the Middle West. Rather he is drawing a realistic portrait and Anne's observations of the squalor of the district and the intolerance and ignorance of its inhabitants provide him with an observer's eye necessary to his portraiture.

Ultimately, Kirkland's portrait of rural life in the Midwest is as damning as Howe's. Zury's unlikely reformation brought about by his marriage to Anne offers no real solution for the future of the region. If Kirkland objected to what he saw as melodrama in Howe's novel, he must have been aware of the failure of the sentimental ending of his own story. What promise there is for the future of Kirkland's region lies in the integrity of hard work which Zury has learned. When Zury goes to the legislature, he is disillusioned by the inefficiency and lack of diligence he finds there; but instead of being able to effect change, he returns home determined against seeking re-election. It is not in social institutions but rather in the "character" of Zury, in his notion of hard work and in his ebullient good humor, that the possibility of a brighter future

for his region resides, though it is a possibility rarely glimpsed in the novel.

In Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County, Kirkland advances the cause of Midwestern realism. He is the first Midwestern fiction writer to portray closely the day-to-day rigors of farm life. He takes up from and excels Eggleston in the use of native dialect and folklore. In Zury and Anne's night together on the river and her subsequent pregnancy (which is "legitimized" by her brief marriage to another man), Kirkland is the first major Midwestern writer explicitly to explore sexual matters in his fiction, though he revised the "offending" sections for later editions of the novel.<sup>62</sup> But perhaps the most important of Kirkland's contributions to Midwestern fiction was his inspiration to and advocacy of the works of Hamlin Garland, whom he called "the first actual farmer in American literature."<sup>63</sup>

In Hamlin Garland's fiction, particularly in the stories that comprise Main-Travelled Roads (1891), the Middle Border of the nineteenth-century finds its most complete expression. Garland, who spent much of his childhood and adolescence on farms in Wisconsin, Iowa, and the Dakotas, lived as a child the life he was later to describe in his fiction.<sup>64</sup> Main-Travelled Roads and Crumbling Idols (1894), Garland's literary manifesto,

are the result of Garland's dedication to realism, or "veritism," as a literary creed to describe the economic and social conditions of his region. Carl Van Doren remarks, "The romantics had studied the progress of the frontier in the lives of its victors; Garland studied it in the lives of its victims."<sup>65</sup> Taken as a whole, Main-Travelled Roads deals the strongest blow to the nineteenth-century romanticization of rural life in the Middle West; yet, paradoxically it affirms an idealistic possibility for the region's future--a possibility that rests firmly on a belief in the Midwestern dream of democracy.

In A Son of the Middle Border (1917), an autobiographical account of his childhood and early adulthood, Garland reflects:

I saw no humor in the bent forms and graying hair of the men. I began to understand that my mother had trod a similar slavish round with never a full day of leisure, with scarcely an hour of escape from the tugging hands of children, and the need of mending and washing clothes. I recalled her as she passed from the churn to the stove, from the stove to the bedchamber back to the kitchen, day after day, year after year, rising at daylight or before, and going to bed only after the evening dishes were washed and the stockings and clothing mended for the night.

The essential tragedy and hopelessness of most human conditions into which our society was swiftly hardening embittered me, called for expression, but even then I did not know that I had found my theme.<sup>66</sup>



Garland is describing here a revelation which came to him when he returned to South Dakota in 1887 for a visit with his parents after having spent three years in Boston where he had spent much of his time attending public lectures and reading voraciously in the public library. There he read Eggleston, Howe, and Kirkland for the first time, became acquainted with W.D. Howells, was exposed to the poetry of Whitman and the philosophical treatises of Herbert Spencer, and the theories of Darwin and Taine, and perhaps most importantly, read Henry George's Progress and Poverty and enlisted himself in George's Single Tax advocacy, a movement to eliminate the tenant farmer system that had become so prevalent an evil in the Midwest. By the time Garland made his visit to his family in South Dakota, he had already become an orator and organizer for farmers' groups and was later to be a professional campaigner for the Farmer's Alliance and for the People's Party. It is from this background of political and theoretical thought that Garland was to see in South Dakota and the rest of the Middle West the material for the stories which were to become the volume, Main-Travelled Roads.

It is almost impossible to separate Garland's political populism from his literary credo of "veritism" as he expounds it in Crumbling Idols. Veritism is, in

fact literary populism. Garland himself asserts the political implications of his literary theory:

If the past was the history of a few titled personalities riding high on the obscure waves of nameless, suffering humanity, the future will be the day of the high average possibility, the abolition of all privilege, the peaceful walking together of brethren, equal before nature and before the law. And fiction will celebrate this life.<sup>67</sup>

For Garland, romanticism is reactionary; it supports and verifies traditions and structures which are essentially aristocratic. Realism is progressive; by depicting life as it is, a need for change and the reason for that need is clearly shown. For all his Darwinian references throughout Crumbling Idols, Garland is a populist idealist who sees in the idea of democracy the possibility of an ideal future:

The realist or veritist is really an optimist, a dreamer. He sees life in terms of what it might be, as well as in terms of what it is; but he writes of what is, and, at his best, suggests what is to be, by contrast. He aims to be perfectly truthful in his delineation of his relation to life, but there is a tone, a color, which comes unconsciously into his utterance, like the sobbing stir of muted violins beneath the frank, clear song of the clarionet; and this tone is one of sorrow that the good<sup>68</sup> time moves so slowly in its approach.

For all the idealistic "softness" of Crumbling Idols, Garland's "veritism," in practice in Main-

Travelled Roads, is perhaps the toughest and unmitigatedly realistic description to be found in Midwestern fiction of the physical and psychological hardships of rural life. Its mood is bitter, its tone angry, even in Garland's dedication of the volume to his parents "whose half-century pilgrimage on the main-travelled road of life has brought them only toil and deprivation."

The world presented in these stories is bleak. In "Among the Corn Rows," the romantic courtship of the country swain and the blushing farmer's daughter is thoroughly debunked as Rob, allowing himself ten days away from his work to find a wife, leaves his homestead and returns to his old settlement where he proposes to Julia, who accepts the proposal to escape the back-breaking labor in the corn field to which she is forced by her father. Even after the engagement is made, Rob hesitates to kiss his betrothed. "I guess we c'n get along without that," he says.<sup>69</sup> In "The Return of the Private," a Civil War veteran, wounded and almost unrecognizable to his wife, returns home from the war to the grim realities of the mortgage system and of poverty. In "Under the Lion's Paw," perhaps the best story in the collection and certainly the most famous, a homesteader who has lost his farm because of a locust blight, rents a run-down farm from a land speculator with the intention of buying the farm at a later date.

After he has built improvements on the farm and made it productive enough to begin buying it, the owner raises the price because of the value of the improvements which the farmer has made. "You had nothin' t' do about that. It's my work and my money," the farmer protests. "You bet it was; but it's my land," the owner answers.<sup>70</sup> "Don't take me for a thief," he continues, "It's the law."<sup>71</sup>

Two of the stories, "The Branch Road" and "Up the Coolly," concern men returning home to visit the farm country after long absences. Each is struck by how different the sordid realities of farm life are from the romantic memory of them which each had formed at a distance. In "The Branch Road," the visitor finds his old sweetheart worn down by poverty and fatigue, and unloved and brutalized by her husband. He persuades her to give up her marriage and to run away with him. In "Up the Coolly," a successful actor returns home to find that his family has lost their farm and are living in poverty as tenant farmers. At first, he believes that his brother's anger and resentment toward him stem from his unwitting neglect of the family and from the contrast between his "gleaming white cuffs" and his brother's muck-covered overalls. The actor comes to realize that he is the cause of his brother's anger because, in neglecting the plight of his home people, he

has become part of the oppressing class. "A man like me is helpless," his brother declares, "Just like a fly in a pan of molasses. There's no escape for him. The more he tears around the more liable he is to rip his legs off."<sup>72</sup> Even when the actor attempts to buy back the family farm, his brother will not accept it--not because of pride, but because of his own sense of weary defeat. "I'm a dead failure. I've come to the conclusion that life's a failure for ninety-nine per cent of us. You can't help me now. It's too late."<sup>73</sup>

In this farmer's resignation is the ultimate tragedy which runs throughout Main-Travelled Roads. That tragedy is the defeat of the human spirit of Garland's characters as they wage their "daily fight with nature and against the injustice of [their] fellow men."<sup>74</sup> Nature, the land, is not always a brutal or antagonistic force; there is a beauty, almost epiphanic, to be found in the land throughout these stories, but the residents of the Middle Border have become too numb from their hardships to see it or to draw consolation from it. Nor is the character of the people of these farms necessarily brutal or savage. Garland's farmers, as a group, are good people, willing to share their few joys with their friends and quick to give such aid and consolation as they can. It is rather the corrupt few, supported by corrupt laws and institutions, that have

beaten these men and women. Given a fair economic chance, and by extension a chance for comfort and for education, these stories say, such "heroic" men and women, by force of muscle and spirit, can conquer the land. As the farmer in "Under the Lion's Paw" says, before he learns that he is to be cheated, "We begin to feel's if we was gitt'n' a home f'r outselves; but we've worked hard. I tell you we begin to feel it . . . and we're goin' t' begin to ease up purty soon."<sup>75</sup>

In a review for Harper's Magazine, which was reprinted as an Introduction to Main-Travelled Roads, W.D. Howells commented:

The stories are full of those gaunt, grim, sordid, pathetic, ferocious figures whom our satirists find so easy to caricature as Hayseeds, and whose blind groping for fairer conditions is so grotesque to the newspapers and so menacing to the politicians. They feel that something is wrong, and they know that the wrong is not theirs. The type caught in Mr. Garland's book is not pretty; it is ugly and often ridiculous; but it is heart breaking in its rude despair.<sup>76</sup>

The uneasiness of Howells toward the savage realism of his protege is evident in this passge and in a later one in which he briefly notes that the ending of "A Branch Road" is "morally wrong."<sup>77</sup> Howells and Joseph Kirkland, who in an 1893 essay in The Dial had advised realists "let the truth be told but not all the truth," had not taken realism to the political and investigatory

extremes that Garland had in his collection.<sup>78</sup>

Garland's dictum for the veritist--"Write of those things of which you know most, and for which you care most. By doing so you will be true to yourself, true to your locality, and true to your time"--is in general accord with Howells' theory of realism as being "nothing more or less than the truthful treatment of material."<sup>79</sup> But in Howells' assertion that fiction writers "should concern themselves with the more smiling aspects of life, which are the more American, and seek the universal in the individual rather than the social interest," Garland's veritism takes a divergent direction from the theories of his Midwestern-Bostonian compatriot.<sup>80</sup>

Main-Travelled Roads constitutes Garland's most highly regarded work. Though he wrote and published numerous novels and collections of fiction throughout his career, only this collection and Rose of Dutcher's Coolly continues to excite critical interest, the latter mainly for Garland's bold use of sexual themes. Perhaps because of the poor sales of Main-Travelled Roads and his other less-distinguished early fiction or because of the brief furor surrounding Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, or perhaps, as Larzar Ziff suggests, because Garland had become comfortable as a literary figure in Chicago where he had resettled, or perhaps because of a combination of

these reasons, Garland retreated from realism to romantic stories of the West and, with what must be seen now as a commonplace paradox, became a marketable writer.<sup>81</sup>

But the anger so often present in Garland's Main-Traveled Roads, as well as Garland's concern with the present, and his commitment to the idea of literary realism as a remedy for social ills were transmitted to a new generation of writers who continued that tradition long after Garland had literally rejected it for greener pastures. In the first quarter of the new century, Floyd Dell, Sherwood Anderson, and Sinclair Lewis were to carry Midwestern social realism to its fullest expression. But in the work of these writers, one rarely glimpses the idealism which lies just below the surface in Garland's and Caroline Kirkland's work. Rather the anger of these social realists is born less from the fear that the Republican Dream is in danger and more from a disillusioned conviction that perhaps the dream is already dead. It will be in Willa Cather's novels that the Midwestern ideal is again glimpsed, but for that expression, Cather will break out of the mold which her predecessors had shaped.



Footnotes to Chapter III

<sup>1</sup> For detailed discussions of populism and literature see Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950). For an historical study of Midwestern populism in the late nineteenth- and the twentieth-century, see Russel Blaine Nye, Midwestern Progressive Politics: An Historical Study of Its Origins and Development, 1870-1958 (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1959).

<sup>2</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> Caroline Matilda Kirkland, Preface, A New Home--Who'll Follow?, Master works of Literature Series, ed. William S. Osborne (New Haven: College and University Press, 1965), p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> C. Kirkland, "Periodical Reading," The United States Magazine and Democratic Review, XVI (January 1845), 61; cited in William S. Osborne, ed., Introd., A New Home--Who'll Follow?, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> C. Kirkland, A New Home, p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> C. Kirkland, A New Home, p. 189.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Clemens, Life on the Mississippi (New York, 1874; New York: The American Library, 1961), pp. 67-68.

<sup>8</sup> Caroline Matilda Kirkland, Forest Life (New York: C.S. Francis and Co., 1842), II, 230-31.

<sup>9</sup> For an examination of the perversion of republican ideals in Kirkland's characters, see John C. McClosky "Jacksonian Democracy in Mrs. Kirkland's A New Home--Who'll Follow?," Michigan Historical Magazine, 45 (December 1961), 347-52.

<sup>10</sup> C. Kirkland, A New Home, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> C. Kirkland, A New Home, p. 180.

<sup>12</sup> C. Kirkland, A New Home, p. 213.

<sup>13</sup> C. Kirkland, A New Home, p. 82.

<sup>14</sup> C. Kirkland, A New Home, p. 227.

- 15 C. Kirkland, A New Home, p. 229.
- 16 C. Kirkland, A New Home, p. 33.
- 17 William S. Osborne in his Introduction to Swallow Barn, or a Sojourn in the Old Dominion, Hafner Library of Classics (Philadelphia, 1832; facs. rpt. New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1971), p. xxxviii, points out: "In some respects Swallow Barn anticipated Mrs. Caroline Kirkland's A New Home--Who'll Follow? (1839) with its sprightly style, its anecdotal air, and its command of narrative without the excitement of high adventure."
- 18 In his Introduction to Swallow Barn, Osborne gives a detailed discussion of Kennedy's debts to and reaction against the work of Washington Irving.
- 19 Both Osborne and Jay Hubbell in The South in American Literature, 1607-1900 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1954), pp. 481-95, accept Kennedy's portrayal of life in Virginia as basically realistic.
- 20 John Pendleton Kennedy, Preface, Swallow Barn, or a Sojourn in the Old Dominion, Hafner Library of Classics, introd. and notes William S. Osborne (Philadelphia, 1832; facs. rpt. of 1853 edition, New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1971), p. vii.
- 21 Kennedy, Swallow Barn, p. 8.
- 22 Kennedy, Swallow Barn, p. 10.
- 23 Alexander Cowie, in The Rise of the American Novel (New York: American Book Co., 1948), pp. 258-70, and Hubbell both remark on the absence of lower and middle-class whites in Swallow Barn. Hubbell's confidence in the realism of Kennedy's portrayal of Virginia plantation life, however, is not shaken by the omission.
- 24 Kennedy, Swallow Barn, pp. 452-53.
- 25 Kennedy, Swallow Barn, p. 459.
- 26 Kennedy, Swallow Barn, p. 460.
- 27 Kennedy, Swallow Barn, p. 454-55.
- 28 Kennedy, Swallow Barn, p. 457-58.
- 29 In fact, the revisions Kennedy made were so minor, often involving only spelling or usage, that the

1853 edition is the generally accepted one by Kennedy scholars.

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Osborne, Introd., Swallow Barn, p. xl.

<sup>31</sup> Metta V. Victor, Alice Wilde, the Raftsman's Daughter, A Forest Romance, The Backwoods Bride: A Romance of Squatter Life. All Beadle's Dime Novels: Francis Fuller Barrit, East and West: Or, the Beauty of Willard's Mill; The Land Claim: A Tale of the Upper Missouri. Also Beadle's Dime Novels.

<sup>32</sup> Henry Nash Smith, The Virgin Land, p. 229.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Eggleston, The Hoosier School-Master, Library Edition (New York: Orange Judd Co., 1892). All references are to this edition which was revised from the 1871 edition only in spelling and in an additional Preface by the author.

<sup>34</sup> Cited in Henry Nash Smith, The Virgin Land, p. 235.

<sup>35</sup> Anthony Hilfer, in The Revolt From the Village, 1915-1930 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), p. 36, contends that Hartsook is "a thoroughly conventional character whose manners and values in no way differ from those of any cultivated Easterner."

<sup>36</sup> Cited in Henry Nash Smith, The Virgin Land, p. 235.

<sup>37</sup> Eggleston, The Hoosier School-Master, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Anthony Hilfer argues that "Eggleston's interest in Hoosier dialect and manners is little more than antiquarianism." The Revolt from the Village, p. 36.

<sup>39</sup> Eggleston apparently took Bud Means' conversion seriously; in the 1880's he founded the Church of Christian Endeavor in Brooklyn and served for a brief period as its pastor. In his 1891 Preface, he mentions that this church is the Church of Best Licks rendered into "respectable English." Hoosier School-Master, p. 25.

<sup>40</sup> Eggleston, The Hoosier School-Master, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> It is interesting that both Carolyn Kirkland and Edward Eggleston became vocal social reformers in New

York after their experiences with rural life in the Midwest.

<sup>42</sup> E.W. Howe, The Story of a Country Town, ed. Claude M. Simpson (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1961), p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Howe, The Story of a Country Town, pp. 7-8.

<sup>44</sup> Howe, The Story of a Country Town, pp. 8-9.

<sup>45</sup> Howe, The Story of a Country Town, p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> Howe, The Story of a Country Town, p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> Howe, The Story of a Country Town, pp. 143-144.

<sup>48</sup> Howe, The Story of a Country Town, p. 195.

<sup>49</sup> Howe, The Story of a Country Town, p. 97.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Claude M. Simpson, Introduction, The Story of a Country Town, p. ix.

<sup>51</sup> Simpson, Introd., The Story of a Country Town, p. xii.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph Kirkland, Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County, introd. John T. Flanagan (New York, 1887; facs. rpt. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), p. 87.

<sup>53</sup> J. Kirkland, Zury, pp. 86-87.

<sup>54</sup> J. Kirkland, Zury, p. 64.

<sup>55</sup> J. Kirkland, Zury, p. 58.

<sup>56</sup> J. Kirkland, Zury, p. 59.

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of J. Kirkland as realist, see John T. Flanagan, "Joseph Kirkland, Pioneer Realist," American Literature, 11 (1939), 273-84.

<sup>58</sup> H.N. Smith, Virgin Land, p. 243.

<sup>59</sup> Dorothy Anne Dondore, in The Prairie and the Making of Middle America: Four Centuries of Description (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: The Torch Press, 1926), p. 326, has another opinion of Anne's character in the novel. She writes, "The fact that the majority of men of Zury's type do not find an Anne McVey furnishes the key to the

work of many of the later rebels." This view of Anne as the savior of Zury is justified in terms of the ending of the novel, but does not take into account that Kirkland, while obviously fond of his character, deprecates her romantic notions of the West.

<sup>60</sup> A. Hilfer, The Revolt from the Village, p. 41.

<sup>61</sup> J. Kirkland, Zury, p. 106.

<sup>62</sup> For a detailed examination of Kirkland's use of sex in Zury and his later revisions of those passages, see Benjamin Lease, "Realism and Joseph Kirkland's Zury," American Literature, 23 (1952), pp. 464-66.

<sup>63</sup> For an account of the Garland-Kirkland relationship, see Clyde E. Hensen, "Joseph Kirkland's Influence on Hamlin Garland," American Literature, 23 (1952), pp. 458-63. For Garland's own account, see Hamlin Garland, A Son of the Middle Border (New York: Macmillan, 1917).

<sup>64</sup> The best and most complete description of Garland's childhood experience with farm life and its influence on his fiction is Donald Pizer's Hamlin Garland's Early Work and Career (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960). For a critical biographical-overview of Garland's entire career, including his later "romantic" period, see Joseph B. McCullough, Hamlin Garland, Twayne's United States Authors Series, ed. Sylvia E. Bowman (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1978).

<sup>65</sup> Carl Van Doren, The American Novel: 1789-1939 (New York: Macmillan, 1940), p. 226.

<sup>66</sup> Garland, A Son of the Middle Border, p. 366.

<sup>67</sup> Hamlin Garland, Crumbling Idols: Twelve Essays on Art Dealing Chiefly with Literature, Painting and the Drama, ed. Jane Johnson (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1961), p. 39.

<sup>68</sup> Garland, Crumbling Idols, pp. 43-44.

<sup>69</sup> Hamlin Garland, Main Travelled Roads, introd. W.D. Howells (1891; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1899), p. 108.

<sup>70</sup> Garland, Main Travelled Roads, p. 142.

<sup>71</sup> Garland, Main Travelled Roads, p. 143.

- 72 Garland, Main Travelled Roads, p. 76.
- 73 Garland, Main Travelled Roads, p. 87.
- 74 Garland, Main Travelled Roads, p. 74.
- 75 Garland, Main Travelled Roads, p. 141.
- 76 William Dean Howells, Introd., Main Travelled Roads, p. 3.
- 77 Howells, Introd., Main Travelled Roads, p. 4.
- 78 Cited by John T. Flanagan, Introd., Zury. It is interesting that Kirkland's statement is also accompanied by his revision of Zury to eliminate the passages concerning sexuality which had offended many readers. Garland was to have the same problem with his novel, Rose of Dutcher's Coolly. Being regarded as a scandalous book, however, made Harold Frederic's The Damnation of Theron Ware an immediate financial success.
- 79 Garland, Crumbling Idols, p. 30. William Dean Howells, Criticism and Fiction, and Other Essays, ed. Clara Marburt Kirk and Rudolf Kirk (New York: New York University Press, 1959), p. 38.
- 80 Howells, Criticism and Fiction, p. 62. It is interesting to note that Howells' boyhood experience in the Midwest as a printer's son was vastly different from the hardship endured by Garland in his childhood. This might in some way account for Howells' reluctance to support farmers' movements, when he was extremely active in other causes. When Garland turns the focus of his fiction away from the Midwest, as Howells had done for most of his career, Garland's realism becomes less politically assertive and resembles more closely that of Howells.
- 81 Larzar Ziff, The American 1890s: Life and Times of a Lost Generation (New York: Viking Press, 1966), pp. 93-108. See Also Bernard Duffy, "Hamlin Garland's 'Decline' from Realism," American Literature, 15 (1953), 69-74; and Charles T. Miller, "Hamlin Garland's Retreat from Realism," Western American Literature, I (1966), pp. 119-29.

## CHAPTER IV

### A HISTORY REINTEPRETED, A PAST DISCOVERED: ELLEN GLASGOW AND WILLA CATHER

I have suggested that the historical imagination, the sense of the accumulation and influence of history on the present, informs much of Southern fiction, and that the predominant literary mode of the expression of the historical imagination in the nineteenth-century is the romance. Although William Gilmore Simms wrote several tales of his contemporary Southern frontier (often referred to as his "border romances"), the most significant body of his ficiton is constituted by The Yemassee (1835) and seven romances of the Revolutionary War in South Carolina--The Partisan (1835), Mellichampe (1836), The Scout (1841), Katherine Walten (1851), Woodcraft (1852), The Forayers (1855), and Eutaw (1856).<sup>1</sup> John Pendleton Kennedy, the only other antebellum fiction writer who rivals Simms in prominence, used the colonial South as the setting of two historical romances, Horseshoe Robinson (1835) and Rob of the Bowl (1838). Taken together, Simms' and Kennedy's historical romances span an historical period of eighty years. After the defeat of the Confederacy, the colonization of the South

and the American Revolution is superseded in historical prominence in Southern fiction by the Civil War and the decade preceding it. The richness of Southern history as the subject for fiction is telescoped into a period of approximately fifteen years.

Nowhere is this telescoping so evident as in the work of romancer John Esten Cooke. Cooke's antebellum romances, Leather Stocking and Silk (1852), The Virginia Comedians (1854), and Henry St. John, Gentleman (1859) are set in colonial Virginia. But following the Civil War, in which he served as a captain under Lee until the surrender at Appomattox, Cooke made a reputation and a considerable livelihood writing chivalric romances of the Confederates--Surry of Eagle's Nest (1866), Mohun (1869), and Hilt to Hilt (1869). Though a reader of today would readily agree with Louis D. Rubin, Jr. that "only the fiercest chauvinism can make Surry of Eagle's Nest . . . into palatable literature," a post-war audience, especially in the North, praised the novel as a masterpiece.<sup>2</sup> In A Certain Measure, Ellen Glasgow recounts an anecdote in which a prominent widow of Richmond tells the author, "I do not deny that there is truth in your book; but I feel that it is a mistake for Southern writers to quit writing about the War. . . . If I only had your gifts I should devote them to proving to the world that the Confederacy was right. Of course I



know that even the best novelists are no longer so improving as they used to be; but I have always hoped that . . . you . . . would write another Surry of Eagle's Nest"<sup>3</sup>

Well over five hundred Civil War novels had been written by 1957, and yet, after so prodigious an outpouring, there appears to be little to refute Professor Rubin's assessment:

There is no War and Peace about the South and its army. There is not even A Farewell to Arms. All we have is Gone With the Wind, a novel comparable only in physical size.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the finest nineteenth century fictional accounts of the conflict are to be found in Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage (1895) and John William De Forest's Miss Ravenel's Conversion (1867), but neither of these are accounts of the Confederacy. Cooke's novels, the fiction of Thomas Nelson Page, and a plethora of other Southern romances and tales codified the myth of the plantation and the chivalric tradition of Southern aristocracy, which had its literary beginnings in Kennedy's Swallow Barn, into what became generally recognized as the Southern Tradition--the nostalgic moonlight and magnolia presentation of the Old South and the Lost Cause. The immense popularity of Page's apologetic elegies of a lost romantic culture in In Old Virginia (1887) and Red Rock (1898) is a testimony not

only to the region's but also to the the nation's identification of the South with the plantation myth. As C. Hugh Holman comments, "In the period between 1890 and 1900, when the historical novel flourished everywhere, the South seemed to be winning in the book stalls the war it had lost on the battlefield."<sup>5</sup>

But if the defeat of the Confederacy provided the stimulus for numerous romances, it also led to the stagnation of the Southern literary imagination. The glorification of the Lost Culture, as the romance usually presented it, did not allow the historical imagination to bridge the gap between the past and the present, between what was lost and what remained. With the Civil War as the historical event and the historical romance as the vehicle for communicating and interpreting that event, the Southern romancer found himself left with a past which found no intersection in the present and allowed for none in the future. The Southern romance was no longer using history to interpret and to make meaningful the present; rather, in the work of the moonlight and magnolia writers, the past and the present were separated by an ever widening gap. Rather than interactive, the romance had become escapist.

For the postbellum South, the overriding issues were social and economic. Though slavery was no longer an active issue, the South's greatest social adjustment

was to be made on the racial question--a question which became increasingly complex as many of the old patrician families found themselves descending on the economic ladder while the former slaves and the "poor white" and middle classes were ascending.

George Washington Cable was one of the few Southern writers who successfully made this social reorganization the theme of an historical novel. Cable's The Grandissimes (1880) is set in New Orleans in 1803, immediately after the Louisiana Purchase.<sup>6</sup> The novel explores two basic themes--one of racial equality between Honoré Grandissime and his quadroon half-brother, an f.m.c. (free man of color) who also bears the name Honoré, and one of the social reorganization of New Orleans Creole culture by the incorporation of Louisiana into the United States. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. has labeled The Grandissimes "the first modern Southern novel" because of its "uncompromising attempt to deal honestly with the complexity of Southern racial experience."<sup>7</sup> Equally important, I would suggest, is Cable's attempt to present the social dilemma brought to Southern society by the disintegration of a culture based on social hierarchy and its eventual replacement with a culture based on an economic one. In fact, these two themes are worked out in a complex formula in which economic

necessity is the catalyst which brings together the two Honorés in the business firm, "Grandissime Brothers."

Cable's novel is a curious blend of the historical romance and the realistic novel of manners. Much of the power and flavor of the novel comes from Cable's close examination of Creole society in New Orleans. The romantic temperament of the Creoles themselves is balanced by Cable's use of irony in his description.<sup>8</sup> His condemnation of the Creoles' treatment of the blacks finds its strongest expression in his depictions of the torture of Bras-Coupé, of the capture and death of Clemence, and of the suicide of black Honoré. Yet, at the center of this novel are the romantic genealogy of the Grandissimes which is traced back to an Indian princess and the gothic legend of the voudou curse of Bras-Coupé. The plot of the novel as well is the romantic tale of an ancient feud between two great families--the Grandissimes and the De Grapions--a feud which is laid to rest at the end of the novel by the promise of a future marriage between white Honoré, the head of the Grandissime family, and Aurora Nancanou, a direct descendent of the De Grapions.

Cable's novel is situated at a time and in a location which allows him to bridge the past and the present and to project that past into the problems he saw in his contemporary Southern society. New Orleans

of 1803 not only allowed him to examine the collapse of a social order but also provided him with free black characters with which to explore his theme of racial injustice. While slavery is a present evil in The Grandissimes, Cable's deepest examinations are of free blacks--Palmyre, Clemence, and black Honoré. Yet, as in Cable's New South of 1880, the specter of slavery broods over his New Orleans of 1803--especially in the legend of Bras-Coupé. In The Grandissimes, and in some of the tales of Old Creole Days, Cable had found the historical situation which allowed him the fullest play of the power of the historical imagination--to make the present understandable by the past. In his later polemical novel, John March, Southerner (1894), Cable was to include many of the same social themes he explored in The Grandissimes, but, without the historical dimension, the novel is much less successful.<sup>9</sup>

There are many similarities in the use of the romance form and the role of the historical imagination between The Grandissimes and Simms' The Yemassee but finally Cable and Simms use the form to different purposes--Simms to uphold a social order and Cable to call that order into question. These differing purposes are reflected in the different emphases of the novels' forms. Simms uses realistic techniques in order to validate his romance; Cable uses romantic elements of

Southern history in his realistic examination of social problems. In The Grandissimes, knights and cavaliers have become literally the stuff of the masquerade ball which opens the novel. By the close of the novel, the projected marriages of Honoré and Aurora and of Frowenfield and Clotilde are promises of future happiness for a property manager and a pharmacist.

The Grandissimes fuses the historical romance and the realistic novel of manners, and in this fusion predicts the direction that Southern letters will take in the twentieth-century. In the romantic tale of the feud between two great families and in his use throughout the novel of gothic legend, Louisiana folklore, and the mysterious past, Cable is an adept practitioner of the romance. In his descriptions of New Orleans and of the manners of its society, in his careful attention to Creole and black dialects, and in his depiction of the social upheaval of a culture, Cable is an accomplished realist. Particularly, Cable's novel shows that the historical imagination, the sense of the accumulation and influence of the past in the present, is not antithetical to the literary practice of realism. This movement in Southern literature from romance to realism was to find its fullest expression in the first quarter of the new century in the Virginia novels of Ellen Glasgow.

In all, Ellen Glasgow published nineteen novels between 1897 and 1941, but her reputation in American letters rests chiefly on her thirteen novels of Virginia and on her collection of prefaces, A Certain Measure (1943).<sup>10</sup> In the preface to The Battle Ground, Glasgow describes her thirteen novels as "a social history of Virginia from the decade before the Confederacy."<sup>11</sup> She divides these novels into three groups, the first group of six novels constituting a history of Virginia from 1850 to 1912, a second group of three "novels of the country" from 1894 to 1933, and the third group containing five "novels of the city" from 1910 to 1917. That Glasgow began her first Virginia novels with such a plan in mind is doubtful, but the interlocking elements of the thirteen novels do lend much credulity to the assumption that Glasgow did conceive such a pattern quite early in her novel sequence.<sup>12</sup> Whatever the case, the Virginia novels do work as a set as most critics have willingly conceded. I am interested, however, in discussing two of these novels in particular--The Battle-Ground (1902) and Barren Ground (1925). These two novels show the ways in which the subject of Glasgow's history and her attitudes toward that history move the form of her novels steadily from the historical romance to the realistic social novel.<sup>13</sup>

Like those of the generation of Southern writers who follow her, most notably Thomas Wolfe and William Faulkner, Glasgow's attitude toward the South is complexly ambivalent. "I had grown up in the lingering fragrance of the Old South," she writes in A Certain Measure, "and I loved its imperishable charm, even while I revolted from its stranglehold on the intellect. Like the new [sic] South, I had inherited the tragic conflict of types."<sup>14</sup> However ambivalent her feelings toward her region may be, she is thoroughly consistent in her prefaces, letters, and discussions with friends in her loathing for the Southern Tradition in fiction:

It was not that I disliked legend. On the contrary, I still believe that a heroic legend is the noblest creation of man. But I believe also that legend to be a blessing must be re-created not in funeral wreaths, but in dynamic tradition, and in the living character of a race.<sup>15</sup>

Glasgow defines herself as a "realist" but not a member of the "American school of refined realism" of which she saw William Dean Howells as "acting dean." She asserts, "I had not revolted from the Southern sentimental fallacy to submit myself to the tyranny of the Northern genteel tradition."<sup>16</sup> Nor, she adds, was she interested in the sort of realism which had "so often degenerated into literary ruffianism."<sup>17</sup> In her most succinct statement of what she means by realism



Glasgow declares, "The true realists . . . must illuminate experience, not merely transcribe it."<sup>18</sup> For Glasgow, this illumination of experience made room for the historical and mythological dimension of Virginia in her depiction of Southern life. Indeed, she contends that the South and the historical idea of the South are inseparable:

The Old South, genial, objective, and a little ridiculous--as the fashions of the past are always a little ridiculous to the present--has vanished from the world of fact to reappear in the permanent realm of fable. This much we have already conceded. What we are in danger of forgetting is that few possessions are more precious than a fable that can no longer be compared with a fact. The race that inherits a heroic legend must have accumulated an inexhaustible resource of joy, beauty, love, laughter, and tragic passion. To discard this rich inheritance in the pursuit of a standard utilitarian style is, for the Southern novelist, pure folly.<sup>19</sup>

After two rather unsuccessful novels, The Descent (1897) and Phases of an Inferior Planet (1898), which Glasgow admits were attempts "to build a philosophy of experience upon the firm theory of evolution," and following her first Virginia novel, The Voice of the People (1900), a novel about post-Reconstruction politics and the ascension of the poor white class, Ellen Glasgow published her only Civil War novel, The Battle-Ground.<sup>20</sup> In spite of Glasgow's own claims for the realism of her antebellum society, it is difficult to find any great

fault with Louis D. Rubin, Jr.'s assessment that "her prewar society is probably romantic, her plantation belles glamorous, her Confederate soldiers cavaliers all."<sup>21</sup> Yet, Glasgow in composing her 1938 preface to the novel declares, "I could detect no flaw in the verisimilitude of the picture."<sup>22</sup> Glasgow's avowed purpose in the novel is "to portray the last stand in Virginia of the aristocratic tradition." Further on in the preface, she gives the reader an idea of why this is a difficult undertaking for a realist:

If I have dealt with the spirit of romance, it is because one cannot approach the Confederacy without touching the heart of romantic tradition. It is the single occasion in American history, and one of the rare occasions in the history of the world, when the conflict of actualities was profoundly romantic. For Virginia, in that disastrous illusion, the Confederacy was the expiring gesture of chivalry.<sup>23</sup>

The Battle-Ground is the story of two aristocratic Virginia families, the Lightfoots of "Chericoke" and the Amblers of "Uplands." In large measure, the novel is a love story of Dan Montjoy and Betty Ambler, and moves in many predictable and expected ways. Dan is the son of Major Lightfoot's daughter whom he disinherited when she eloped with Montjoy, a violent man of a lower social station. At the beginning of the novel, Dan's mother has died and the sixteen-year-old boy has left his father and arrives penniless and hungry at Chericoke.

The Major welcomes him into the family and raises him as an equal with the Major's nephew, Champe. Although as the Major's grandson, Dan is deserving of this attention, the boy is often troubled by what he calls the "Montjoy blood" in his character and often describes himself as only half a Lightfoot. His Lightfoot "half" is the inheritance of civilized gentility, but Dan fears the Montjoy violence of his other side. J.R. Raper has labeled this theme in the novel as "the psychological consequence of heredity."<sup>24</sup> It is only through the experience of the war and his meeting his father again that Dan is freed from this schizophrenic view of his own character.

Fully half of The Battle-Ground is devoted to establishing the way of life of the antebellum Virginia aristocrats. Glasgow's depictions of manners, dress, and attitudes, often on ceremonial occasions such as balls and Christmas celebrations, evoke a romantic era of grace and splendor reminiscent of the moonlight and magnolia writers. Dan, a handsome and rebellious young man, after a brief infatuation with the other Ambler sister, recognizes his love for the spritely red-haired Betty. Their courtship is a series of elegant and amusing repartées.

Yet, within this gallant and gentle society are the seeds of its impending collapse. Major Lightfoot, a

lovable, blustering and kindhearted gentleman, is a rabid secessionist as well. Governor Ambler, a staunch unionist and a man with a clear-eyed vision of the dangers of the South's political course, is ineffectual in his attempts to bring his patrician neighbors to reason. In the numerous polite arguments between the Major and the Governor, Glasgow hints that it is precisely because of politeness and manners that the cool heads of the South could not thwart the secessionist impulse. The rules of this polite society are responsible for its own downfall.

As a presage to his entering the war, Dan is disinherited by the Major because of the youth's participation in a duel over a barmaid. There is an inherent irony, however, in Dan's plight. Though Dan considers himself to be "a beggar" and takes employment as a stagecoach driver, he does so with an offer to study law with a prominent judge to back him up, with his servant, Big Abel, at his side, and with a large compliment of rich clothes and possessions. Whatever pose Dan may choose to take, Glasgow makes it clear that after his association with the Lightfoot name, the rest of Southern society will never let Dan return to the state of the penniless boy who arrived at the gates of Chericoke. Dan's social standing makes his rebellion little more than a holiday.

It is in the second half of the novel, devoted to the actual war and its effects on Southern society, that Glasgow's claims for the novel's realism are justified. Though her scenes of battle are few in the novel, what Glasgow does show of the war and particularly of camp life are the result of her research in journals, diaries, and newspapers of the war period and her own visits to the locations she describes.<sup>25</sup> Her battle scenes are reminiscent of Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage in their detail and their evocation of atmosphere.

In his first experience in battle, Dan finds out how thin the coverings of civilization and culture really are. The violence of his "Montjoy blood" rises to the surface. Glasgow's description is significant:

As he bent to fire, the fury of the game swept over him and aroused the sleeping brute within him. All the primeval instincts--the instincts of bloodguiltiness, of hot pursuit, of the fierce exhilaration of the chase, of the death grapple with a resisting foe--these awoke suddenly to life and turned the battle scarlet to his eyes.<sup>26</sup>

After the battle he is overcome with nausea, but his education in war has begun, and through his participation in the conflict, Dan comes to learn that there are no real gentlemen, only men, and that men are sometimes less human than they would wish to be. Dan comes to agree with Governor Ambler that "the best or the worst of it is that after that first fight it comes

easy, . . . it comes too easy."<sup>27</sup> Dan's education in the discrepancies between the world of Chericoke and the "real" world of the war is furthered by his companionship with Pinetop, an illiterate mountaineer. In his association with Pinetop, Dan confronts for the first time the true evils of the class system:

For the first time in his life he was brought face to face with the tragedy of hopeless ignorance for an inquiring mind, and the shock stunned him beyond the power of speech. . . . Beside that genial plantation life he had known he saw rising the wistful figure of a poor man doomed to conditions he could not change--born, it may be, like Pinetop, self-poised yet with an untaught intellect grasping, like him, after the primitive knowledge which should be the birthright of every child. . . . yet these were the men who, when Virginia called, came from their little cabins in the mountains, who tied the flint-locks upon their muskets and fought uncomplainingly until the end.<sup>28</sup>

Dan learns, in the course of his experience, to live in rags, to steal, to eat "nigger-food", to suffer pain, and, finally, to be one in a group of men. In her preface to The Battle-Ground, Glasgow writes, "Nothing in my inquiries into the past had interested me more than the democratic feeling in the Army of Northern Virginia."<sup>29</sup> For Glasgow, democracy was perhaps the most valuable lesson that the South was to learn from the war.

After the Appomattox surrender, Dan is able to make his own peace with the experience of the war:

Despite the grim struggle and the wasted strength, despite impoverished land and the nameless graves that filled it, despite his own wrecked youth and the hard-fought fields where he had laid it down--despite all these a shadow was lifted from his people and it was worth the price.<sup>30</sup>

This shadow, of course, is the slave system and the class system of the Old South.

Dan returns home to find Chericoke burned and the Major welcoming but unregenerate, and gives himself over to the care of Betty who in her own way has also been able to come to terms with the experience of war. With Betty, Dan finds the strength to take up the struggle to rebuild their lives and, at least metaphorically, the South.

In her posthumously published memoirs, The Woman Within (1954), Glasgow writes of Hamlin Garland: "His first volume of stories, Main-Travelled Roads, showed an almost savage fidelity to life."<sup>31</sup> Certainly there are resonances of the ending of Garland's "Return of the Private" in a passage near the end of The Battle-Ground which describes the situation Dan and Betty face at the end of the war:

For a country that was not he had given himself as surely as the men who were buried where they fought, and his future would be one long struggle to adjust himself to conditions in which he had no part. . . . The army was not the worst, he knew this now. . . the worst was what came afterward, this sense of utter

failure and the attempt to shape one's life to brutal necessity. In the future that opened before him he saw only a terrible patience which would perhaps grow into a second nature as the years wore on.<sup>32</sup>

In an often quoted passage from A Certain Measure, Glasgow asserts that "what the South needed was blood and irony"--blood because it had "strained too far away from its roots in the earth" and irony because irony is "the safest antidote to sentimental decay."<sup>33</sup> Blood and irony are the characteristics which Dan and Betty possess and indeed will need to possess in their grapple with Reconstruction. Dan and Betty are left to face the world with blood and irony, not with optimism; yet the sense, at the end of the novel, is that if courage and realism are to be the requirements of that facing, Glasgow's desentimentalized couple may make their way in the New South.

Glasgow uses the romantic mythologies of the Old South in The Battle-Ground to show that it was the romantic chauvinism of that culture which brought its downfall upon itself. On his return home from the war, Dan is fed by a woman whose son died in Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg. "It was worth living to die like that" is Dan's consoling remark to the woman. "And it is worth living to have a son die like that," the woman affirms.<sup>34</sup> Glasgow's attitude here is ironic. As the ending of the novel makes clear, those who remain living



will have to leave such romance to the dead and to forge a new world out of defeat. To live still within the romance is to become like Mrs. Blake in The Deliverance who lives completely in a dream world of the undefeated Confederacy while her children try to protect her from the realities of Reconstruction.

The progression in The Battle-Ground from romance to realism is also a view of history from the antebellum to the Reconstruction society. History becomes an evolutionary rather than a cyclical force, a progression of a culture through time rather than the preservation of the past in the present. With such a view of history, the historical imagination becomes again a dynamic force in fiction, but the method of expression of that imagination moves from the romantic to the realistic.

Glasgow has written that "with the possible exception of Dorinda Oakley in Barren Ground, Betty Ambler has been the best liked of my heroines. . . . For the South at least, she seemed to personify the spirit that fought with gallantry and gaiety, and that in defeat remained undefeated."<sup>35</sup> Certainly, Betty's heroism has its parallels in Dorinda Oakley's. Glasgow sums up the "implicit philosophy" of Barren Ground as being that "one may learn to live, one may even learn to live gallantly, without delight."<sup>36</sup> Dorinda is the inheritor of the post-Reconstruction South. Her story, which

takes place between 1894 and 1924, is a story of the reformation of the class structure in Virginia. Glasgow's description of this class structure is worth quoting in full:

The tenant farmers, who had flocked after the ruin of the war as buzzards after a carcass, had immediately picked the featureless landscape as clean as a skeleton. When the swarming was over only three of the larger farms at Pedlar's Mill remained undivided in the hands of their original owners. Though Queen Elizabeth County had never been one of the aristocratic regions of Virginia, it was settled by sturdy English yeomen, with a thin but lively sprinkling of the persecuted Protestants of other nations. Several of these superior pioneers brought blue blood in their veins, as well as the vigorous fear of God in their hearts; but the great number arrived, as they remained, "good people," a comprehensive term, which implies, to Virginians, the exact opposite of the phrase, "a good family." The good families of the state have preserved, among other things, custom, history, tradition, romantic fiction, and the Episcopal Church. The good people, according to the records of clergymen, which are the only surviving records, have preserved nothing except themselves. Ignored alike by history and fiction, they have their inconspicuous place in the social strata midway between the lower gentility and the upper class of "poor white," a position which encourages the useful rather than the ornamental public values.<sup>37</sup>

Dorinda Oakley is from a "land-poor" family of "good people" of pioneer stock. The family farm is "Old Farm," "a thousand acres of scrub pine, scrub oak, and broomsedge, where a single cultivated corner was like a solitary island in some chaotic sea."<sup>38</sup> Dorinda's father is described as "a slave to the land, harnessed

to the elemental forces, struggling inarticulately against the blight of poverty and the barrenness of the soil."<sup>39</sup> Dorinda's mother is a pioneer woman whose strength comes from her strong devotion to the teachings of the Presbyterian Church.

In contrast to the Oakleys are the Ellgoods who, on the basis of a small inheritance and progressive farming methods, have managed to make "Green Acres" a thrifty but productive farm. The purely aristocratic family, the Greylocks, consists now only of an old alcoholic doctor who lives with his black serving woman and the mulatto bastards he has fathered by her, and the doctor's son, Jason, a young doctor who has recently returned to Pedlar's Mill to care for his father whom he believes to be dying. The Greylock estate, "Five Oaks," has been left to revert to scrub pine and broomsedge.

The land is the metaphor of the accomplishments of these families. The Ellgood's farm is rich in pasture and alfalfa, and every year more land is being reclaimed and put into use. Old Farm, in spite of Joshua Oakley's dogged exertion, is slowly being overrun by broomsedge. Five Oaks has not been farmed in years and is completely wild. The two dominant social groups--the pioneer descendents like the Oakleys and the aristocrats like the Greylocks are fading out of the social structure of Pedlar's Mill. For reasons inherent in their own social

character, both groups are unable to survive in their contemporary worlds--the aristocracy because of their inherent weaknesses and the pioneer descendants because of their ignorant distrust of new ideas which has led them to literally wear out the soil with tobacco. Only a few "good people," such as the Ellgoods, and the merchant class and the industrious blacks seem to be able to adjust to the changing conditions of the South.

The success which Dorinda eventually achieves is, on one level, the result of her ability to impose her will upon historical forces. Her youthful infatuation with and seduction by Jason Greylock is a result of her idealization of his weaknesses into romantic nobility. She is literally enraptured by his words, his appearance and his idealism. He is, to her, the symbol of everything the Oakleys are not. When Jason betrays Dorinda by weakly allowing himself to be pressured into marriage to Geneva Ellgood, pregnant Dorinda runs away to New York where, after losing Jason's child by a miscarriage, Dorinda learns to take control of her life and to survive in that alien setting. It is during her years in New York that Dorinda is able to break free of the influence of historical forces which controlled her life at Pedlar's Mill. She develops the emotional and psychological fortitude which will make her a survivor in the world which crushes her father and Jason. She

also learns to use the "instinct for survival" which she inherits from her father and mother. When she realizes that somehow her fate is tied to the land her relatives settled, she returns home. She takes over operations at Old Farm and eventually, through intelligence, fortitude, and will, rebuilds Old Farm and acquires Five Oaks which Jason, helplessly alcoholic and alone after Geneva's suicide, has lost to taxes.

Barren Ground is divided into three sections-- "Broomsedge," "Pine," and "Life-Everlasting." The "Broomsedge" section details Dorinda's affair with Jason and her New York experiences; "Pine" chronicles Dorinda's victorious struggle with the land, her sterile marriage to Nathan Pedlar, and her "revenge" on Jason through her acquisition of Five-Oaks; "Life-Everlasting" narrates Dorinda's middle-aged years (forty-two to fifty), and her adoption of and caring for the debilitated Jason Greylock. Broomsedge, pine, and life-everlasting also have symbolic uses throughout the novel. Broomsedge is the botanical "fate" of the land and its inhabitants. The harp-shaped pine which grows out of the Oakley graveyard is a symbol of the hardiness and richness of Dorinda's pioneer heritage. Life-everlasting, along with its obvious rhetorical value, is a symbol of peace and beauty on an otherwise blighted landscape.

These three natural symbols, coupled with the sections named after them, intertwine into a complex theory of history in the novel, with broomsedge as the trap of the Southern past, pine as a richness of the past which is translated into the present, and life-everlasting as a promise for the future. In "Broomsedge," Glasgow shows how the social structure of the Old South and its heritage has doomed the Oakleys and the Greylocks to a steady decline in the post-Reconstruction South. In "Pine" is shown Dorinda's rejection of that idea of historical necessity and her reshaping of her historical heritage by her literal clearing of the broomsedge. "Pine" is ultimately a section on the triumph of the individual over the forces of history. "Life-Everlasting" examines Dorinda's coming to terms with her society's and her own history and gives the promise that that reconciliation will continue in the future through her step-son, John Abner.<sup>40</sup>

In her preface to Barren Ground, Glasgow comments, "while I have faithfully painted the colours of the Southern landscape, I have always known that this external vraisemblance was not essential to my interpretation of life."<sup>41</sup> Mrs. Glasgow is, of course, correct in this assessment of the universality of Dorinda's predicament as a nineteenth-century woman trying to come to terms with the modern world. But I think that Mrs.

Glasgow is perhaps wrong as well, for Dorinda, while a victim of the larger changing world, is also a victim of a uniquely Southern idea of history, an idea that the past is a force which constantly impinges upon the present moment and which must be confronted, struggled with, and incorporated meaningfully into the present. Dorinda is in many ways, as is Betty Ambler, an archetypal female martyr of the New South who, by her sacrifice and her fortitude, brings the past into a dynamically creative, rather than destructive, relationship with the present. The Battle-Ground and Barren Ground show how the historical imagination grapples with and eventually may succeed in reshaping the past. As these two novels exemplify, the mode of that expression becomes increasingly realistic.

As Ellen Glasgow struggled in the first quarter of the twentieth-century to break from the established mold of the romantic tradition in Southern letters, Midwesterner Willa Cather was also breaking the mold of her own literary tradition--realism. One needs only to consider Cather's contemporaries, Dreiser, Anderson, Dell, and Lewis, and to compare her elegiac novels with their social realism to see how wide a gap exists between Cather and her Midwestern compatriots. In one sense, Cather's progression as novelist is the inverse of Glasgow's. Alexandra Bergson's conquering of the

land which defeated her father in O Pioneers! (1913) is, at least on the surface, much the same story as Dorinda Oakley's. By 1927 with Death Comes For the Archbishop, Cather is writing the historical novel which Glasgow eschewed after The Battle-Ground. Yet, in any final analysis, it must be considered that Cather and Glasgow are both working toward at least one common artistic goal--to bring the past and the present together into a meaningful and understandable relationship. With Glasgow, however, the past must be reinterpreted by the present; with Cather, the present needs measuring by the past.

I suggested in the previous chapter that much of the impulse behind the development of Midwestern realism was a psychological use of the present tense by Midwestern writers. Furthermore, this engagement with the present results from an idea of the Midwest as a new place, unhindered by the past and unlimited in the future. I also conjectured that the failure of Midwestern society to achieve its ideal potential resulted in the social invective which dominates the work of the nineteenth-century Middle Border novelists.

By the end of the first decade of the new century, two things were glaringly obvious to the Midwestern writer. The Midwest was no longer "new" and populism was giving way quickly to middle-class materialism. In



fiction, "the revolt from the village" resulted from this realization. Following an impulse which has its roots in novels such as The Story of a Country Town and Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, the end of the second decade of the twentieth-century was marked by the attack on provincialism of the small town. Anthony Hilfer, in his fine study of this impulse, defines the attack in this way:

The village was synecdoche and metaphor. The village represented what Americans thought they were, what they sometimes pretended (to themselves as well as others) they wanted to be, and if the small town was typically American, the Midwestern small town was doubly typical. The basic civilization of America was middle class, a fact somewhat obscured in city novels that tended to treat the extremes of the very rich and the very poor to the exclusion of the middle. Even the East, dominated by its cities, usually granted the superior "Americanism" to the Middle West. Thus the Midwestern novelists of the teens and twenties could see their locale as a microcosm of the nation and, provincial bourgeoisies that they were, of the world. But their view was critical. The town was the focus of what was in actuality an over-all attack<sup>42</sup> on middle-class American civilization.

A two-year period saw the publication of Winesburg, Ohio (1919), Moon-Calf (1920), and Main Street (1920).

Shortly, the retreat from the Midwest was on; writers moved first to the city, then to the East, and then often on to Europe--and they took many of their novels with them.

Willa Cather had preceded this retreat in her own moves from Red Cloud to Lincoln to Pittsburgh to New York, but ironically, many of her novels remained at home, set in the Midwest. Certainly Cather was not given to any idealization of the small town. The stories in her first collection, The Troll Garden (1905), especially "The Sculptor's Funeral" and "A Wagner Matinee," are as scathing in their indictment of provincialism as any of the sketches of Winesburg, Ohio. But with her second novel, O Pioneers!, Cather had determined that the retreat, if it were to be made, was not to be made to the East but rather into the past.

In her essay entitled "The Novel D meubl " (1922), Cather asserts that "the novel for a long while has been overfurnished" and advocates "throwing out the furniture" of fiction.<sup>43</sup>

There is a popular superstition that "realism" asserts itself in the cataloguing of a great number of material objects, in explaining mechanical processes, the methods of operating manufactories and trades, and in minutely and unsparingly describing physical sensations. But is not realism, more than it is anything else, an attitude of mind on the part of the writer toward his material, a vague indication of the sympathy and candor with which he accepts rather than chooses, his theme?<sup>44</sup>

Cather differentiates between observation, which she calls "the low part" of a writer's "equipment," and selection or simplification which she regards as the

highest. "If the novel is a form of imaginative art, it cannot be at the same time a brilliant form of journalism."<sup>45</sup> Opposed to journalism in Cather's view is creation:

Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there--that, one might say, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself.<sup>46</sup>

Cather concludes her essay by noting that "the nursery tale, no less than the tragedy, is killed by the tasteless amplitude" and she calls upon the writer to "leave the scene bare for the play of emotions."<sup>47</sup>

This essay, it seems to me, explains in its polemics much about Cather's views of literary form, history, and society. What she means by realism based on the individual feeling is not quite realism at all but a nineteenth-century romantic view handled with the techniques of the modern novel. Her condemnation of materialism in society is coupled with an antimaterialistic view of art as well. As her contemporaries were investigating the complexity of modern life, Cather is calling for an almost Thoreauvian simplification. Aesthetics and ethics are fused together in a system that places the

verities in opposition to complexities. Truth and verisimilitude may be at odds.

Implicit in this aesthetic doctrine is a retreat from the complex and modern into the past; the ideal art is "as bare as the stage of a Greek theater."<sup>48</sup> It is worth noting that Cather's metaphors of empty rooms and bare stages are reflected in the landscapes of her novels--Nebraskan prairies and New Mexican mesas.

This notion of ethical aesthetics helps to explain the progression in Cather's use of the past in O Pioneers! (1913), My Antonia (1918), and The Professor's House (1925). Cather's fusion of the past with the present is most successful the further away that her characters are removed from the modern world. In O Pioneers!, the actual land of the Great Divide is presented at its most mythic and symbolic level. The earth itself becomes an historical force which links Alexandra Bergson with the prehistory of the continent. My Antonia, through the characters of Antonia Shimerda and Jim Burden, links the values of the world of the settler with the man of the modern world. What the modern world has lost is still recoverable through the character of Antonia. In The Professor's House, the present and the values of the past are finally divided when Godfrey St. Peters succumbs to the demands of the forces of his modern world.

With the exception of the romantic tragedy of the murder of the young lovers, O Pioneers! is the chronicle of Alexandra Bergson's relationship to the land or to what Cather frequently refers to as the "Spirit" or "Genius of the Divide."<sup>49</sup> Alexandra is both literally and figuratively "pure" in her devotion to the land. Her recurring dream is of a man--"like no other man she knew," who is "yellow like the sunlight" and has "the smell of ripe cornfields about him"--who carries her "as easily as if she were a sheaf of wheat."<sup>50</sup> Alexandra is united with the land:

For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, until her tears blinded her. Then the Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it ever had before. The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman.<sup>51</sup>

Alexandra is literally in touch with the land; she sees it as a living dynamic force with which she communes. She succeeds in creating a prosperous farm where her father had failed because, in part, of some mythic and racial understanding she has of the land. Her father saw the land only as antagonist:

In eleven long years John Bergson had made but little impression upon the wild land he had come to tame. It was a wild thing that had

its ugly moods; and no one knew when they were likely to come, or why. Mischance hung<sup>2</sup> over it. Its genius was unfriendly to man.

Cather alludes to this sense of Alexandra's mythical communication with the land throughout the novel. In the final passage of O Pioneers! is the promise of a mystical rebirth for Alexandra when she literally becomes part of earth. The country will "receive hearts like Alexandra's into its bosom, to give them out again in the yellow wheat, in the rustling corn, in the shining eyes of youth!"<sup>53</sup>

The apostrophic title of the novel is not borne out in the story. The other pioneers do not live in the same relationship to the physical world as Alexandra does and which Cather seems to value so highly. Alexandra's two older brothers share neither her communion with nor her faith in the earth. Carl, Alexandra's close friend, and Emil, Alexandra's cherished younger brother, both make their way into the modern world. Though he is engaged to Alexandra at the end of the novel, Carl's returns to the prairie are temporary. Emil's return is fatal and his death seems to be some sort of blood sacrifice demanded of Alexandra by the land. Emil and Carl have lost Alexandra's simplicity, and with it, the ability to communicate with the primordial Genius of the Divide.

The past of O Pioneers! is finally not the historical period of the novel, but rather a past that stretches back prehistorically and is lodged in our racial memory and in the character of Alexandra. O Pioneers! is an elegy to the irrecoverable innocence and simplicity of the American garden.

My Antonia is structured on dichotomies--the past and the present, the town and the farm, Jim Burden and Antonia Shimerda. The novel is Jim Burden's story as the title implies and the introduction makes explicit. It is a story of the past, but of a personal past--Jim Burden's Antonia. As his name implies, Jim is weighted down by the modern world and his memories of his youth on the Nebraska prairie form a system of values by which he finds the present to be lacking. He is now a corporation lawyer for the railroad (traditionally, the symbol of opposition to the farmer) and lives in New York with his wife "who lives her own life" and "for some reason . . . wishes to remain Mrs. Burden."<sup>54</sup> This thumbnail sketch is all that we know about the mature Jim Burden because, in his own narrative, he wishes to recapture the past, not to speak of the present. It is his prerogative as artist, but often in his narrative he unconsciously shows the present impinging upon the past. One excellent example of this comes early in the novel:

Sometimes I followed the sunflower-bordered roads. Fuchs told me that the sunflowers were introduced into that country by the mormons; that at the time of the persecution, when they left Missouri and struck out into the wilderness to find a place where they could worship God in their own way, the members of the first exploring party, crossing the plains to Utah, scattered sunflower seeds as they sent. The next summer, when the long trains of wagons came through with all the women and children, they had the sunflower trail to follow. I believe that botanists do not confirm Fuch's story, but insist that the sunflower was native to those plains. Nevertheless, that legend has stuck in my mind, and sunflower-bordered<sub>55</sub> roads always seems to me the roads to freedom.

The knowledge of the modern world continually distances the past.

In the first section of the novel, "The Shimerdas," the country population composed of the first settlers' families and various immigrant groups, forms an egalitarian society. Jim grows up playing with Antonia whose family arrived in the district the same evening as Jim. When Jim's family moves to town and Antonia is hired to cook at the house next door, the relationship between Jim and Antonia undergoes a subtle change as the section title, "The Hired Girls," implies. Such distinctions, after the closeness of the families in the first section, point out the artificiality of the structure of town society. Increasingly, Jim and Antonia are separated by social convention. He is a "Black Hawk" boy; she is a "country girl." And in the eyes of the town



mothers, the country girls are a "menace to the social order."<sup>56</sup>

Just before Jim leaves town to study at the university in Lincoln, he goes on a picnic with the country girls. In a magnificently conceived scene, Cather presents an epiphany of the values that Jim is leaving behind in the country:

Just as the lower edge of the red disk rested on the high fields against the horizon, a great black figure suddenly appeared on the face of the sun. We sprang to our feet, straining our eyes toward it. In a moment we realized what it was. On some upland farm, a plough had been left standing in the field. The sun was sinking just behind it. Magnified across the distance by the horizontal light, it stood out against the sun, was exactly contained within the circle of the disk; the handle, the tongue, the share--black against the molten red. There it was,<sup>57</sup> heroic in size, a picture writing on the sun.

As with the sun-flowers, narrator Jim Burden cannot leave the image at its symbolic and most meaningful level. He cannot stop himself from diminishing it:

The ball dropped and dropped until the red tip went beneath the earth. The fields below us were dark, the sky was growing pale, and that forgotten plough had sunk back into its own littleness somewhere on the prairie.<sup>58</sup>

As Burden's narrative moves closer and closer into the present, Antonia's place in the novel recedes. Others of the country girls move away from the district. Lena, Antonia and Jim's friend, moves to Lincoln and

later to San Francisco. Another of the girls, Tiny, after numerous adventures becomes a wealthy entrepreneur in San Francisco. When Jim sees her there years later, she confides to him "that nothing much interested her now but making money."<sup>59</sup> The sense is that as successful as these girls become, they are also, like Jim, corrupted by the modern world.

Even the small town of Black Hawk is enough to corrupt Antonia; she becomes pregnant by a train conductor who promises to marry her and then deserts her. In shame, Antonia returns to the Shimerda farm and works like a man in the fields. Later, when Jim visits her on a trip back through town, she has become her old self again; she has been metaphorically cleansed by her contact with the earth. Even with her child, she is a "country girl" again.

As many critics have pointed out, in Burden's account of his visit with Antonia after a twenty year absence, Antonia becomes an earth-mother figure. The scenes of Antonia with her "ten or eleven" children almost ooze fertility. Antonia's table, garden, and grape arbor are cornucopian. She has become, for Jim, a symbol of the irrecoverable past:

She lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true. I had not been mistaken. She was a battered woman now, not a lovely girl; but she still had that something which fires the

imagination, could still stop one's breath for a moment by a look or gesture that somehow revealed the meaning in common things. She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last. All the strong things of her heart came out in her body, that had been so tireless in serving generous emotions.

It was no wonder that her sons stood tall and straight. She was a rich mine<sup>60</sup> of life, like the founders of early races.

Burden's final word in the novel is an elegy:

For Antonia and me, this had been a road of Destiny; had taken us to those early accidents of fortune which predetermined for us all that we can ever be. Now I understood that the same road was to bring us together again. Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the previous, the incommunicable past.<sup>61</sup>

Yet the elegy is only Jim's, not Antonia's. What Jim has lost in the modern world, Antonia still possesses in hers. Burden has forgotten what Antonia told him when he had parted from her twenty years previously. When Jim promises to return, Antonia replies, "Perhaps you will-- . . . But even if you don't, you're here, like my father. I won't be lonesome."<sup>62</sup> Antonia, in living close to the earth has never been forced into fragmenting the past and the present. Instead, for her, they are one. Unlike Jim's, her present is as full as her past. Jim, the artist, can only recreate what Antonia, the pioneer woman, lives.

In The Professor's House (1925), the sense of the past which was immediate in O Pioneer! and recoverable through art in My Antonia is finally made unavailable to Professor St. Peter by the pressure of the world around him. St. Peter is a man who has lived in the past for much of his adult life. He is a professor of history at a small college; he has lived in France, the home of his ancestors; and he has accepted his post at a small college in Michigan because it is close to Lake Michigan, the place of his childhood. But most importantly, he has lived in the New World with the Spanish explorers during his fifteen year eight-volume project, Spanish Explorers in the New World. The last two volumes of his study have brought him international acclaim and have made him the recipient of the Oxford Prize, a large cash award with which, at his wife's urging, he has bought a new home he neither needs nor desires. St. Peter suddenly has everything material but he has lost his relationship with the past in the completion of his project. This loss is paralleled by the fact that his move to his new home will force him to leave his old study, the location in which he escaped the present and has been able to recover the past through his work.

St. Peter has lost Tom Outland, a gifted student and friend who was killed in the First World War. Before coming to college. Outland had discovered the

remains of an ancient civilization in New Mexico and had traveled to Washington in an attempt to persuade the Smithsonian Institute to excavate the site. When his attempts failed, he returned to New Mexico to find that his partner had sold the artifacts. Refusing to touch his share of the money, Outland comes to college and goes on to become a physics instructor. Shortly before he goes to war, Outland invents an airplane engine and wills the rights to St. Peter's older daughter who, with her husband, develops the patent into a considerable fortune.

The Professor's House is divided into three parts: "The Family," "Tom Outland's Story," and "The Professor". "The Family" relates St. Peter's life and establishes his love of history and knowledge and his opposition to the materialism of his family. The Professor would gladly give back his prize money if he could have "bought back the fun [he] had writing [his] history."<sup>63</sup> The second section of the novel is Outland's journal account of his discovery of the cliff-dweller remains. It chronicles Outland's excitement over his find and his disillusionment over what he regards as the betrayal by his partner, and ends with Outland's leaving for college. Part three, "The Professor", describes St. Peter's summer alone in his old rented house where he has moved while his wife tours Europe with his daughter and

son-in-law. During this summer of meditation, the professor is able to recapture the past of his childhood but also suffers from severe depression. When he learns of his family's imminent return from Europe, he loses the boy alter-ego he had recovered through his meditations and, in a mood of severe depression, cannot bring himself to save himself when the gas stove in his study almost asphyxiates him. He is saved only by a chance visitor. Knowing that he can never again recover the past which had made his life meaningful to himself, he is left to face the materialism of his family and the modern world:

He had never learned to live without delight. And he would have to learn to, just as, in a Prohibition country, he supposed he would have to learn to live without sherry. Theoretically he knew that life is possible, many be even pleasant, without joy, without passionate griefs. But it had never occurred to him that he might have to live like that.<sup>64</sup>

The corruption of the past and the artist by materialism is the major theme of the novel. Both St. Peter and Outland who never wished for wealth are cursed with a Midas touch. The rewards of the Professor's research threaten not only his removal from his study in the rented home, but also his marriage due to his wife's new-found acquisitiveness. The Outland fortune corrupts not only St. Peter's family, but also, by association, the Professor himself. Money, which was not available

for Outland's excavation, becomes, after Outland's death, the legacy by which Outland's memory lives. Cather's final irony is the Professor's son-in-law's use of some of the Outland money to establish a memorial to Outland, not as the man who discovered a lost civilization, but as the man who invented the airplane engine worth so much. "If Outland were here tonight," the Professor muses, "he might say with Mark Antony, My fortunes have corrupted honest men."<sup>65</sup>

The Professor's House is Cather's expression of the aesthetic ethical nightmare implied in "The Novel D meubl ." Materialism triumphs over art; modern society renders the past irrecoverable; simplicity falls victim to complexity; and passion gives way to apathy. St. Peter's historical imagination which constantly connects history with the present moment extinguishes itself. The sense that could find some consolation in connecting his wealthy daughter's ostentatious shopping spree in Chicago with "Napoleon looting the Italian palaces" is no longer available to him.<sup>66</sup>

Though he has learned, like Dorinda Oakley, to face the world without joy and without passion, St. Peter has lost "something very precious" in his coming to terms with the modern world.<sup>67</sup> He is "indifferent" to his life; he has lost his desire.<sup>68</sup>

Early in the novel, Cather underlines the importance of that desire:

A man can do anything he wishes to enough, St. Peter believed. Desire is creation, is the magical element in that process.<sup>69</sup>

Dorinda Oakley, through sacrifice and will, shapes her destiny and reinterprets her history. In The Professor's House, St. Peter is defeated by the forces of the modern world. Finally, sapped of his desire and his imagination, he relinquishes himself to apathy. Unlike his beloved explorers and cliff-dwellers who shaped a world, St. Peter is finally and despairingly shaped by his.

Lying on his old couch, he could almost believe himself in that house already. The sagging springs were like the sham upholstery that is put in coffins. Just the equivocal American way of dealing with serious facts, he reflected. Why pretend that it is possible to soften that last hard bed?<sup>70</sup>

In his study of Willa Cather's life, James Woodress notes the many similarities between the lives of Cather and St. Peter, including Cather's receiving the Pulitzer Prize and her growing status as a literary celebrity.<sup>71</sup> Whether Cather experienced any apathetic reaction to her growing wealth and fame is not known, but, after The Professor's House, Cather never again attempted in a novel to fuse the modern Midwest with the past. Only two of her last five novels have settings in the Midwest,



and the action of these novels takes place in urban settings, Chicago and New York. Cather's remaining novels are retreats into the past, to the nineteenth-century Southwest in Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927), to seventeenth-century Quebec in Shadows on the Rock (1931), and to the antebellum South in Sapphira and the Slave Girl (1940).

Ellen Glasgow and Willa Cather occupy similar positions in the literature of their regions. Both writers were striving to break out of the literary molds which had predominated the literary expressions of their regions. For Glasgow, this meant not only breaking away from the immediate Southern Tradition of the Antebellum culture of Cooke and Page, but also separating herself from an entire literary tradition of the historical romance and the notion of history that it implies. This meant transforming the notion of history as fate that predominated Southern letters and much of Southern thought throughout the nineteenth-century. As Glasgow herself noted, the richness of the heroic legend of the South could not be discarded but rather had to be brought again into a dynamic relationship with the present. Glasgow's New South is not romantic, and the terms of the expression of that section and its people demanded of her a more realistic approach than the romance could provide. As I have suggested, even in The

Battle-Ground, the romantic form of the novel changes with its subject matter. Glasgow's antebellum South is romantic, but her depiction of the Civil War and its aftermath are firmly in the realist tradition. Mythology is not discarded nor is the past refuted in Glasgow's novels; nowhere is there the sense that Glasgow believes the past to be unimportant to the present. Rather, throughout Glasgow's work is the idea that the past must be recognized and confronted as a force in the lives of her Southern characters. To ignore the past is impossible, but to hide from the present is disastrous, as it proves for Major Lightfoot in The Battle-Ground or for the Greylocks in Barren Ground. From her early Virginia novels to her late comedies of manners, the incompatibility of the idealized past and the imperfect present is the situation for the dramas in almost all of Glasgow's work. The sense of the past impinging upon the present moment and the necessity for the novelist to explore and to document and, perhaps, to make meaningful that intersection has not diminished in Glasgow's fiction. In this sense, Glasgow is the inheritor of the Southern literary tradition which extends back to Simms.

Perhaps, as most Cather scholars speculate at one time or another, it was Cather's early childhood in Virginia before her parents moved her to Nebraska which bred in her such a longing for the past. Or perhaps, as

other critics have speculated, Cather retained throughout her life a farmgirl naivete about modern life. But it is finally difficult to believe that the artist who chose only in the twilight of her career to write a novel set in the South was so greatly influenced by those early years, or that the worldly woman journalist who spent most of her life in New York and was quite comfortable in Europe was never quite able to look the modern world squarely in the face. As James Woodress has pointed out in his critical biography of Cather, many of the sources of Cather's novels come directly from her childhood and college years in Nebraska.<sup>72</sup> Certainly her reverence for the pioneer heritage of the Midwest comes from this experience, but Cather's use of that heritage is a direct result of her communication with the modern world. Alfred Kazin puts it well when he states:

What she loved in the pioneer tradition was human qualities rather than institutions--the qualities of Antonia Shimerda and Thea Kronberg [the heroine of The Song of the Lark], Alexandra Bergson and Godfrey St. Peter--but as those qualities seemed to disappear from the national life she began to think of them as something more than personal traits; they became the principles which she was to oppose to contemporary dissolution.<sup>73</sup>

Most of Cather's heroes and heroines are either pioneers and farmers or artists. As such, they are in touch with elemental beauties which guide and instruct them.

Cather's reaction against the realism of her predecessors and her peers is, I think, a reaction against what she probably saw as indictment without instruction. Certainly Cather was as much in the legion against provincialism and injustice as Joseph Kirkland, Howe, or Garland. Certainly she was as vigorously the opponent of narrow-mindedness and materialism as Anderson, Dell, or Lewis. In fact, Cather might be said to be the most Midwestern in her outrage at the unfulfilled promise of her region and at the pawning of the region's future by modern society. Unlike her contemporaries, however, but like many of her predecessors, there is in Cather the belief that the values lost in the past may somehow provide a promise for the future. At bottom, she is, like the long line of Midwestern writers who precede and succeed her, a lecturer, a moralist, and a social critic.

In The Woman Within, Ellen Glasgow declares, "My social history had sprung from a special soil, and it could grow and flower, naturally, in no other air."<sup>74</sup> Willa Cather could make the same claims for O Pioneers!, My Antonia, and The Professor's House. Certainly, Glasgow and Cather, outside of any regional considerations have made large and lasting contributions to American letters, as have Simms, Garland, Cable and Howe. John Pendleton Kennedy, Joseph and Caroline

Kirkland, and Edward Eggleston are subjects of continuing interest to literary scholars, but mainly as regional writers. In the novels of Glasgow and Cather is a pervasive sense of place; the work of both authors is of America, but of different Americas. All are novels in which their characters confront a changing world, but those worlds and the changes within them are different for each novelist. Glasgow's *Southerners* and Cather's *Midwesterners*, like their authors, are from different regions and cultures, and they face their dilemmas with attitudes and values which result from different pasts and different attitudes toward history, from different social structures and different social customs, from vastly different landscapes and very different lives.

In Chapter I, I cited Hamlin Garland's definition of regional literature, "a literature as no other locality could produce, a literature that could not have been written in any other time, or among other surroundings."<sup>75</sup> I have attempted to show in this study that "locality" and "surroundings", region and the psychology of region, can be as important an aspect as "time" in our understanding of American literature and the direction it has taken. Certainly "time" is our most available category for the organization of literary history. Over time, we can see patterns emerge in literary form, theme, and subject. But such categorization points

mainly to similarities and often does not account for, or ignores, the differences which create the richness of American letters. Such patterns can show the similarities in William Gilmore Simms and Nathaniel Hawthorne, in Caroline Kirkland and John Pendelton Kennedy, in Ellen Glasgow and Willa Cather, and may even point to some of the differences. But I would argue that it is "locality" and "surroundings," much more than "time," which are the impulses and impetuses behind the artist's creation of the work itself and often behind the form which the work will take. The study of American literature and the study of regional letters are not separate, but rather, taken together, are integral to our understanding of the literature this country has produced.

Footnotes to Chapter IV

<sup>1</sup> The "border romances" include Guy Rivers (1834), Richard Hurdis (1838), and Beauchampe (1842). Only Beauchampe, Simms' romance of the Beauchampe-Sharpe "Kentucky Tragedy", receives much critical attention by modern scholars and that attention, for the most part, is because the novel is a fictional account of an historical event which has fascinated other American writers, among them Edgar Allen Poe (Politan) and Robert Penn Warren (World Enough and Time), The Scout was originally titled The Kinsman; Woodcraft first appeared as The Sword and the Distaff.

<sup>2</sup> Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "The Image of an Army: The Civil War in Fiction," in Southern Writers: Appraisals in Our Time, ed. R.C. Simonini (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1964), p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen Glasgow, A Certain Measure: An Interpretation of Prose Fiction (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1943), p. 84.

<sup>4</sup> Rubin, "The Image of the Army," p. 53. In Fiction Fights the Civil War (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 1957), Robert A. Lively examines over five hundred historical novels of the Civil War.

<sup>5</sup> C. Hugh Holman, The Immoderate Past: The Southern Writer and History (Athens, University of Georgia, 1977), p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> For the major positions on The Grandissimes, see Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957), pp. 167-76; Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (New York: The American Book Co., 1948), pp. 445-67; Jay Martin, Harvests of Change: American Literature, 1865-1914 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967) pp. 81-105. The Southern Quarterly: A Journal of the Arts in the South, 18, 4 (Summer 1980) contains seven articles on The Grandissimes in celebration of the centennial of that novel's publication. See also Louis D. Rubin, Jr., George W. Cable: The Life and Times of a Southern Heretic (New York: Pegasus, 1969) and Arlin Turner, George W. Cable: A Biography (Durham: Duke University Press, 1956).

<sup>7</sup> Rubin, George W. Cable, p. 78.

<sup>8</sup> For a full discussion of Cable's use of irony in The Grandissimes, see William Bedford Clark, "Humor in Cable's The Grandissimes," The Southern Quarterly, 18, 4 (Summer 1980), 51-59.

<sup>9</sup> Much like Hamlin Garland, later in his literary career Cable retreated almost entirely from realism and wrote nostalgic romances of the Old South. The Cavalier (1901) was Cable's greatest financial success.

<sup>10</sup> Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Many fine studies of Glasgow work are available. See especially, Ellen Glasgow: Centennial Essays, ed. M. Thomas Inge (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976); Blair Rouse, Ellen Glasgow, Twayne's United States Authors Series (New Haven: College and University Press, 1962); Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1942), pp. 257-64; C. Hugh Holman, "Ellen Glasgow and the Southern Literary Tradition," Southern Writers, pp. 103-23; J.R. Raper, Without Shelter: The Early Career of Ellen Glasgow (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1971); and Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of The American Novel: From the Birth of the Nation to the Middle of the Twentieth Century (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1952), pp. 267-80. See also, E. Stanley Godbold, Jr., Ellen Glasgow and The Woman Within (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1972).

<sup>13</sup> Most of Glasgow's later novels are comedies of manners. These include The Romantic Comedians (1926), They Stooped to Folly (1929), The Sheltered Life (1932), and In This Our Life (1941).

<sup>14</sup> Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 142-43.

<sup>20</sup> Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 59.



- 21 Rubin, "The Image of the Army," p. 58.
- 22 Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 6.
- 23 Glasgow, A Certain Measure, pp. 24-25.
- 24 J.R. Raper, Without Shelter, p. 173.
- 25 For an account of Glasgow's sources, see A Certain Measure, pp. 19-21.
- 26 Ellen Glasgow, The Battle-Ground (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1902), p. 312.
- 27 Glasgow, The Battle-Ground, p. 315.
- 28 Glasgow, The Battle-Ground, p. 442.
- 29 Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 22.
- 30 Glasgow, The Battle-Ground, p. 485.
- 31 Ellen Glasgow, The Woman Within (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1954), p. 141.
- 32 Glasgow, The Battle-Ground, pp. 492-93.
- 33 Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 28.
- 34 Glasgow, The Battle-Ground, p. 497.
- 35 Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 5.
- 36 Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 155.
- 37 Ellen Glasgow, Barren Ground (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1925), p. 4.
- 38 Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 6.
- 39 Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 32.
- 40 For a further discussion of Glasgow's use of natural symbols in Barren Ground, see Joan Foster Santas, Ellen Glasgow's American Dream (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1965), pp. 138-163.
- 41 Glasgow, A Certain Measure, p. 153.
- 42 Anthony C. Hilfer, The Revolt from the Village, 1915-1930 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1969), pp. 4-5.

<sup>43</sup> Willa Cather, "The Novel *Démeublé*," in Not Under Forty (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1936), p. 43.

<sup>44</sup> Cather, "The Novel *Démeublé*," p. 45.

<sup>45</sup> Cather, "The Novel *Démeublé*," p. 48.

<sup>46</sup> Cather, "The Novel *Démeublé*," p. 50.

<sup>47</sup> Cather, "The Novel *Démeublé*," p. 51.

<sup>48</sup> Cather, "The Novel *Démeublé*," p. 51. Critical studies of Willa Cather abound. She was the first woman writer to be included in Fifteen Modern American Authors: A Survey of Research and Criticism, ed. Jackson R. Bryer (Durham: Duke University, 1969), pp. 23-62. Much of the Cather criticism is often eccentric and much of it, especially that dealing with Cather's "retreat" from realism, is ill-willed. Some of the best critical assessment of Cather is to be found in Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds, pp. 247-257 and in Louis Auchincloss, Pioneers and Caretakers: A Study of Nine American Women Novelists (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1964), pp. 92-122. Indispensable is James Woodress, Willa Cather: Her Life and Art (New York: Pegasus, 1970). Two collections of reviews and essays, Willa Cather and Her Critics, ed. James Schroeter (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1967) and The Art of Willa Cather, ed. Bernice Slote and Virginia Franklin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1974), are quite useful. See also, E.K. Brown and Leon Edel, Willa Cather: A Critical Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953); and Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, Willa Cather: A Memoir (Philadelphia, 1953; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1963).

<sup>49</sup> For a close examination of the mythic aspects of O Pioneers! and My Antonia, see John H. Randall, III, "Interpretation of My Antonia," in Willa Cather and Her Critics, pp. 272-322.

<sup>50</sup> Willa Cather, O Pioneers! (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913), p. 206.

<sup>51</sup> Cather, O Pioneers!, p. 65.

<sup>52</sup> Cather, O Pioneers!, p. 20.

<sup>53</sup> Cather, O Pioneers!, p. 309.

<sup>54</sup> Willa Cather, Introduction, My Antonia (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918).

- 55 Cather, My Antonia, pp. 28-29.
- 56 Cather, My Antonia, p. 201.
- 57 Cather, My Antonia, p. 245.
- 58 Cather, My Antonia, p. 245.
- 59 Cather, My Antonia, p. 301.
- 60 Cather, My Antonia, p. 353.
- 61 Cather, My Antonia, p. 372.
- 62 Cather, My Antonia, pp. 322-23.
- 63 Willa Cather, The Professor's House (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925), p. 33.
- 64 Cather, The Professor's House, p. 282.
- 65 Cather, The Professor's House, p. 150.
- 66 Cather, The Professor's House, p. 154.
- 67 Cather, The Professor's House, p. 282.
- 68 Cather, The Professor's House, p. 267.
- 69 Cather, The Professor's House, p. 29.
- 70 Cather, The Professor's House, p. 272.
- 71 Woodress, Willa Cather: Her Art and Life, pp. 207-13.
- 72 Woodress, Willa Cather: Her Art and Life, passim.
- 73 Kazin, On Native Grounds, p. 250.
- 74 Glasgow, The Woman Within, p. 195.
- 75 Hamlin Garland, "Provincialism," in Crumbling Idols (1894), (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1960), p. 10.

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